

**Enhancing the professionalism of early years educators:  
a model of support for professional development**

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**Abstract**

This dissertation presents an intervention-based study that aimed to enable early years educators to develop and enact a particularly agential mode of professionalism, helping them to negotiate the challenges and constraints inherent in their work with young children and their families. A non-positional approach to teacher leadership was adopted as a means to mobilise all those involved to participate in collaborative, collective and situated processes that impacted on their professional development. The 'Making a difference in the early years programme' provided a context-tailored strategy which, through reflective tasks and dialogic activities, supported educators with initiating and leading a collaborative development work process in their own settings. A critical action-based methodology was employed that emphasised context and researcher reflexivity amongst a cohort of 15 participants. Data was collected using a range of programme-based methods and artefacts, analysed deductively and inductively, and narrated critically to maintain coherence and convey chronology. The study outcomes indicate that early years educators may enact an extended professionalism when the proper support is provided. At the individual level, this is enabled through a transformation in educators' perspectives towards a self-empowered, agential mindset that leads them to act strategically to improve practice. However, these insights clarified the contribution of my research to the field of support for professional development in the early years sector.

A model of support is proposed as an alternative to the technical-rationalist and transmissive approaches which dominate the provision of opportunities for professional development. The proposal reflects the following. First, the infrastructure surrounding support for professional development should be carefully considered. This positions participants and organisation leaders as vital, expert and generative co-producers rather than consumers of readymade professional development packages. Second, the focus of the provision of support should acknowledge the educator and her context as the starting point for professional learning, rather than preconceived content based on specifications of knowledge and skills. Third, facilitation of the programme should be appropriate to securing a system in which educators can become maximally agential and exercise leadership. Fourth, knowledge building and practice development should be viewed less as the development of technical know-how and the dissemination of teaching tips. The sharing and scrutinising of narratives helps collective understandings and self-efficacy to flourish within the group. The effect is of a sense of belonging to an early years community, which might be diverse in its make-up, but nevertheless shares common goals and values.

## **Declaration**

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration, except as specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted or is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit of 80,000 words excluding figures and references.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Introduction

Education matters to me. The research I have undertaken is inextricably bound up with my 28 years' experience as a teacher and, in particular, my view of what it is to be an educator of young children. The focus of my research emanates from a professional concern; one arising from my role as an independent consultant. I provide support for the professional development of those working in the 'early years' sector of the education system, which involves babies and children aged up to five years. In England, nomenclature of those working in the sector is contentious and an issue I return to throughout the thesis. However, I use the term 'early years educator', or simply 'educator', throughout the thesis, to include all those working in the sector irrespective of their role, qualifications or work context. I use the term 'setting' to mean any organisation or institution where early years educators work with young children and their families.

### **The focus for my research: a professional concern**

I was perturbed about the issues arising from conversations with early years educators. Some of the educators I met through my work seemed enthusiastic about recent policy innovations; keen to enrol on programmes that confer professional status or inspired by recent in-service training to make changes to classroom environments and teaching practice. Many others appeared confused about the rate of national policy change and what appear to be increasingly intensified working conditions within the sector, or what is known locally as the 'early years foundation stage' (EYFS). They described a range of feelings, including anxiety at a perceived downward pressure to prepare children for the beginning of compulsory schooling, disillusionment with their role and a sense of a loss of control over their daily practice. This was illustrated by a highly experienced nursery teacher, Sally.

*I've got to the point where I'm second guessing all the time. Sometimes I just wish someone would tell me precisely what to do and then I'd just get on and do it.*

(Sally, nursery teacher in a primary school, November 2014)

It seemed to me that a number of early years educators appeared overly compliant in their approach to their work with young children; unwilling transmitters of an unsuitable curriculum, reproducers of knowledge rather than pedagogues or co-constructors of knowledge with children (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999). In part, this may be attributed to the professionalisation agenda, which has been developing over the last two decades, in the early years sector of the education system in England. It emphasises a particular role for those working in this area, one which involves a particular model of technical practice, is tightly regulated and subject to judgements in terms of performance (Osgood, 2012).

Whilst this prevailing view of early years educators compelled me to act as a researching practitioner, what also shaped my perspective and chosen approach to my research was a recent, albeit brief, return to the classroom. Spending two terms as a Nursery teacher at my own children's school helped me understand some of my colleagues' experiences at first hand. I provide an account of this episode in my own professional life in Chapter 3 and explain how although this highly emotionally charged experience had a somewhat detrimental impact on my own professional identity, it fuelled my resolve for action.

At the heart of my research is an effort to support educators of young children develop and enact an extended 'professionalism' (Hoyle, 1974). I define this as a particularly agential stance that enables them to negotiate the challenges and constraints inherent in their work with young children and their families. This thesis accounts for an action-based research project designed to combat the stereotypical view of early years educators as 'feminine child-carers' and 'passive-resistant workers' (McGillivray, 2008) by ensuring they have at their disposal what has been described as 'an opportunity to subvert and resist prevailing and dominant understandings of their professionalism' (Osgood, 2006:12). Over the course of three years, I initiated, devised and facilitated a year-long programme of professional learning to support early years educators by nurturing and enabling their capacity to lead change and innovation in their workplaces.

The intervention I developed is grounded in the work of the HertsCam Network of which I am a member (Frost, 2013; Ball, Lightfoot and Hill, 2017). The network's teacher-led development work programme, initially used with great success in Hertfordshire (UK) secondary schools, recognises that all teachers can lead innovation, build professional knowledge, develop leadership capacity, influence colleagues and develop practice if they have access to supportive structures and strategies (Mylles, 2006). The HertsCam approach offered me a way forward in my work with those who teach the youngest children in our education system. I first led the 'Making a difference in the early years' programme in September 2015 with 15 participants. The following year a further 12 early years educators participated. The programme is now an established professional learning and development opportunity offered by the HertsCam Network and is facilitated by one of the original participants.

### **Research aims**

An aim of my study was to generate knowledge about the issue of extended professionalism, but I also had a practical aim, and that was to make a difference to a particular group of people through a programme of support. I was committed to making a positive difference to the lives of young children in our school system through my work with early years educators. I was interested in how I might, in my role as a provider of support for professional development, offer a programme that would support early years educators enact a more extended professionalism as they negotiate the current early years education context. My research is therefore closely aligned to my own daily practice and addresses what for me was problematic in my interactions and work with early years educators. My motivations and commitment to the development of my own practice were therefore central to the research process itself (Schatz and Walker, 1995). By admitting that I hold values that affect the research I carried out, I was keen to ensure that I scrutinised my actions and motives carefully. In Chapter 5 I discuss my approach to developing reflexivity throughout the research process.

## **The approach to research**

A moral perspective determined the aims of my work, but also the methodological approach to the research, as outlined in Chapter 5. For me, engaging in research was an opportunity for generating and finding new possibilities for action, in addition to creating new knowledge through that action. I share Schratz and Walker's (1995) view that theory and practice cannot be kept separate. Therefore, my approach to the research was necessarily action-based and developmental in nature. This appealed to me, as the assumption is that action research ought to lead to change in an immediate and direct way. It was my intention that the leadership of this action would inform and generate insights, knowledge and understanding about both the issue of extended professionalism and the process of supporting it: a process that had the potential to change the lives of the participants, the institutions in which they work and my impact on myself as a researching practitioner.

Although my research is constrained by a particular national context and its small-scale nature, I view it as an attempt to reclaim and reconstruct professional learning and development in the early years sector that goes some way to addressing Sheridan et al's (2009) call for the building of theories and evidence about:

...not only the forms (i.e. methods, structures or delivery approaches) but also its processes (i.e. underlying mechanisms responsible for or influencing change) and proximal and distal outcomes (i.e. effects on the practitioners themselves and the children/families they serve).

(Sheridan et al , 2009:378)

Crucially, I did not aim to produce generalisations about the one best way to do this. Nor did I seek to prove causal links between the 'Making a difference in the early years' programme I devised and a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. What I wanted was to work with early years educators in a way that would address the core problem as outlined at the beginning of this chapter, but would also create knowledge about how best to support them to enact their professionalism in a satisfying, sensible and sustainable way in their own specific contexts.

I have been encouraged by a number of insights that demonstrate that educators did change the way they construed and enacted their professionalism. This has not only led to changes in personal or professional capacity but has emphasised the notion of leaderful behaviour in early years settings, that which supports innovation and improvement in classroom practice and enhances educational outcomes for children. My thesis presents a model of professional development that supports these transformational changes.

### **The structure of the thesis**

My research focus was to enhance extended professionalism through a programme of support. At the centre of this thesis is an examination of the programme I initiated and led. The thesis comprises 8 chapters. The first chapters are conceptual in nature. Chapter 1 outlines the background of early years education in England and considers the effect of broader context and structures on educators' experiences of their work with young children. In Chapter 2 I examine what it means to be a professional educator in the early years sector, exploring the notion of professional identity and the types of professionalism enacted by early years educators. In this chapter I draw upon the evidence from an exploratory study in which I interviewed nine early educator respondents. Chapter 3 critically considers how professional identities are shaped and supported through current national and local approaches to professional development and learning opportunities in the sector. These chapters constitute an adequate conceptualisation to frame the research and helped to shape the rationale for the methodological approach I adopted. The following two chapters are concerned with the detail of this rationale. Chapter 5 explains my stance as a researching practitioner and the necessity for developing a reflexive stance in my work. Chapter 6 is concerned with the rationale for the action-based approach to the research process and its design. Chapters 7A, B, C and D provide an account of the intervention. This is presented as a critical narrative in four parts, relating the insights gleaned throughout the process. Chapter 8 clarifies a model of support for professional development. I then present my conclusions, including my thoughts about the sustainability of the professional learning and development programme and the wider implications of my study.

## **Chapter 1**

### **The English context for early years education**

The significance of context to the development of both professional identity and the ways in which educators are enabled or prevented from enacting an enhanced or extended professionalism is key. Therefore, in Chapter 1, I start by examining the political background that shaped and currently influences the early years education sector, with an emphasis on two particular developments: first, the professionalisation agenda and its impact on notions of professionalism and second, the particular approach to school readiness prevalent in policy and its impact on practice in the sector.

In the Introduction I explained the professional concern at the heart of my research. I noticed that many of the early years educators with whom I worked appeared to be disillusioned with their role, were experiencing a loss of control over their daily practice and seemed anxious about an apparent downward pressure to ensure young children were ready for the formalised teaching and curriculum demands of the first year of statutory schooling. Tensions existed between the ways in which educators construed the purpose of early years education, their views about their roles and the pedagogy they might employ to secure positive learning outcomes, and the expectations relayed to them about these via externally imposed national policy changes, requirements and initiatives.

In this chapter I set out a contextual analysis, first briefly outlining the developing policy context for early years education and care over the past thirty years in England. I go on to relate more recent major developments. This includes the creation of the Early Years Foundation Stage, a phase of education encompassing children from birth to five years of age. Next, I explore the move to the ‘schoolification’ of the sector (OCED, 2017). This phenomenon is driving early years settings to adopt practices that are usually more related to primary school, specifically highly teacher-directed pedagogies and an erosion of play-based learning. I then turn to the current professionalisation agenda. I note the impact of each on constructions of the purpose and role of early years education and care; the



role of the educator in the sector and pedagogy and practice in the sector. I conclude this chapter by articulating alternative notions of professionalism for early years educators which contrast with that espoused by current policy statements.

### **The early years education and care policy context pre-2005**

In the early 1990s a lack of investment in the sector and a split system of care and education meant provision was fragmented and uncoordinated. Cameron and Miller (2016) explain that the sector during this time was characterised by the following features:

- a belief in mothers as the best carers for young children and parents as responsible for their upbringing
- a reliance on the private market
- part-time provision of education for children aged 3 and 4 years in some schools and nursery schools in areas of high deprivation, staffed by teachers and nursery nurses
- full- or part-time day nursery provision for children with high levels of social need or with working parents who could afford the fees, staffed by nursery nurses or childcare workers
- childminders in domestic premises, private but regulated by the local authority
- playgroups, run by voluntary community organisations, low fees and low or no wages for staff, regulated by the local authority

Early years education and care remained tangential to the ‘real business’ of statutory schooling regardless of its long history and despite the Plowden Report’s (CACE, 1967) favourable view of the benefits of nursery education for three and four year olds until the mid 1990s when early years education and care and family life became a political issue.

Better quality, accessible childcare and an entitlement for all three and four -year olds to free part time education was promised by the New Labour government's National Childcare Strategy outlined in Meeting the Childcare Challenge (Secretary of State for Education and Employment, 1998). Investment in the sector followed during the government's three terms in office. It was then that the sector first became the subject of wide reform aimed at helping families to combine work and care responsibilities and an attempt to address high levels of child poverty in the UK. Early years workers, who were a largely invisible and unknown workforce until this point, found themselves key to the success of New Labour's Ten Year Childcare Strategy (DfES, 2004). This emphasised 'choice and flexibility' for parents, 'affordability' of provision, 'quality' provision and a 'strengthened qualification and career structure' for the workforce. Funding and investment led to expansion of services to young children and their families and it appeared that issues of access, equity and quality were finally being addressed.

International initiatives were also causing interest within the sector at this time for practitioners and researchers alike (Soler and Miller, 2003). Three approaches in particular were influential in shaping thinking about early years pedagogy. Reggio Emilia nurseries in Italy emphasised following the interests of the child (Edwards, Gandini and Forman 1993). An international travelling exhibition of the work of these settings had a widespread influence on thinking about the role of the adult in supporting children's learning and the concept of noticing and documenting learning began to impact on practice. New Zealand's 'Te Whariki' curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996) emphasised developing mutual relationships between families, early years professionals and the wider community. Scandinavian style outdoor education and the Forest Schools movement, in particular, also played a role in influencing pedagogy (Maynard, 2007). These approaches reinforced the image of the child as a powerful learner and cast educators as enablers and supporters of the learning process. They informed the content of the Birth to Three Matters guidance (DfES, 2003) and the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA, 2000) which was intended to support those teaching four and five-year olds in school-based settings.

However, there remained a pervading split between maintained and non-maintained provision. This involved a deep, historical institutional divide between early years education in maintained nursery and primary schools and the provision of care for babies and toddlers in private, voluntary and independent settings (PVI). Those working in maintained settings tended to be teachers, degree educated and highly trained nursery nurses, their focus was children's academic progress. Those in PVI settings had fewer or vocational qualifications. Maternal, caring and affective capacities and experience were valued in their work with children under school age. Pay, status and conditions for employees in the PVI sector were generally inferior compared to those in maintained settings, who received more favourable pay, longer holidays and a shorter working day.

The complex system of early years education in England has been subject to unprecedented attention and relentless change in the last fifteen years; some of this designed to eliminate the divide in the sector. A key development was the Childcare Act (DfES, 2006) which sought to bring some cohesion to the diversity of early years provision. It established that all provision in the sector involved early learning, development and care and paved the way for the creation of the Early Years Foundation Stage in England.

### **The Early Years Foundation Stage**

The introduction of a common curriculum framework and a revised inspection procedure aimed to address the pervading split between care and education. This was driven by one of the key findings of the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education project (Sylva et al., 2004), that educational outcomes for young children were best in those settings which successfully united cognitive and social development. As a result, all providers of early years education and care for children from birth to five years, including childminder, private, voluntary and independent settings and state-maintained nursery and reception classes, were required to follow a single curricular framework, The early years foundation stage (DCSF, 2008). The

term early years foundation stage (EYFS) became synonymous with the phase of education and care for babies to five-year olds.

This framework depicted education and care as inseparable aspects of provision for young children and was based on four guiding principles:

- every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured
- children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships
- children learn and develop well in enabling environments, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers
- children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates.

The new framework characterised young learners as competent co-constructors of knowledge in social contexts, ones in which there was an explicit understanding of child-centred, play-based experiential learning. Although educators were not required to use a particular pedagogy, the documentation and further non-statutory guidance associated with it, for example, *Development Matters in the EYFS* (2012) advised that the principles should shape practice in early years settings. Since the principles supported an active play-based and child-centred learning, the policy development was welcomed by educators in both maintained and non-maintained settings. According to the findings of the study *Practitioners' Experiences of the Early Years Foundation Stage* (DfE, 2010) there was broad consensus that the framework influenced many aspects of daily practice and improved the quality of experience for young children and their parents.

Academics from the community were supportive of the development also. The creation of a discrete educational phase, one that is distinct from primary education was commended by Rogers (2011). The merits of the accompanying curriculum in which teaching encompassed the many ways adults help young children learn – interactions during planned and child-initiated play, communicating and modelling language, showing explaining, demonstrating, exploring ideas, questioning, setting

challenges were praised by Pugh (2010). She was encouraged that such a statutory commitment to play-based approaches to learning would aid settings and providers in pushing new boundaries for early years pedagogy. Moyles (2009) similarly highlighted the commitment of the government to raise the status and quality of early years education: the validation of the uniqueness of each child was, in her opinion, a critical step forward for policy makers. Not everyone shared these positive outlooks, for example, Clarke (2013) cautioned that the involvement by central government in the daily lives of young children signalled the privileging of an outcomes-driven agenda linked to a progressive focus on transmission approaches to teaching and learning.

### **More recent developments**

The particular ideological shifts that Chalke (2013) warned of accompanied significant policy developments in the sector. Longitudinal studies (e.g. Sylva et al., 2004; Harvard University, 2010) acknowledged that early years provision is integral to positive health, educational and overall life chances, consequently policy makers identified the sector as a key lever for improving and addressing wider political issues. Supranational organisations such as the OECD and UNESCO, which provide internally comparative data about early years education, added weight to policy development in England, that advocated the immediate benefits of early years education for children and its long-term impact and benefits for society in general. This was affirmed by reviews focusing on early intervention for disadvantaged children (Allen Report, 2011; Munro Report, 2011) and the Tickell Review (2012), which considers evidence about children's development, developmental assessment, and safeguarding. Considerable expansion of the sector followed with increased funding and investment and attention to access for all children and their families (Wood, 2017).

The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2012) was subsequently revised but continued to be grounded in fundamental principles which underpin provision and practice in the sector as a whole. These include:

- the key role of play in learning and development
- the use of mixed pedagogical approaches
- the quality of relationships and interactions between children, families and educators
- the use of documentation as a means of formative and informative assessment

These underlying principles encouraged many working in the sector, especially the prevailing notion that it remained a recognised key lever for improving outcomes for all children, especially those that are disadvantaged. However, the principles outlined above became compromised by an accompanying quest for substantial, measurable outcomes in exchange for investment in the sector (Ang, 2014). A raft of neo-liberal policies and associated initiatives focussed on a restrictive range of educational outcomes for young children. Narrowly focussed assessment processes, inspection regimes, comparative benchmarking and monitoring of children's educational outcomes are viewed as a means of guaranteeing children's readiness for school. These processes led to a phenomenon known as the 'schoolification' of the early years sector. I discuss this next.

### **School readiness and the 'schoolification' of early years education**

In this section I explain how the nature and benefits of early years education are being jeopardised by a particular approach to school readiness engendered by the government agenda and associated practices mentioned above. Early years provision is associated with positive benefits for children's social and emotional growth, cognitive and academic aspects of learning and general development and positive impact on families and the wider community (Melhuish, 2015). Five factors in particular contribute to this: educators' knowledge of how young children learn; adult-child verbal interaction; educators' knowledge and understanding of the curriculum; educators' skill with supporting children in resolving conflicts and educators' aiding parents in providing learning opportunities at home (Melhuish 2015). These factors are at risk from being compromised by a particular construct of

‘school readiness’ and an associated ‘schoolification’ of the sector. I explain both of these in turn and demonstrate their connection and impact on the sector.

‘School readiness’ is well researched within the early years sector. ‘School’ in this phrase refers to the first year of the primary phase, in England this is known as Year 1. School readiness tends to be associated with children having well developed social skills; a good degree of independent personal care; being able to cope with separating from main caregivers and a generally positive disposition to learning (Bertram and Pascal, 2002). Young children transitioning to the first year of formal schooling are viewed in this way.

They come through the gates of the institution with a bundle of diverse previous experiences, a bank of knowledge and skills already mastered, a brain wired up and eager to absorb masses of new information and, most importantly, a disposition towards learning.

(Whitebread and Bingham (2012: 70)

Such skills and dispositions are viewed as crucial for educational outcomes in national (Sylva et al., 2004) and international studies (OECD, 2006; Lewis, 2010). These recommend that governments should consider extending the enabling child focused early years pedagogy into the first year of formal schooling. Despite this the current approach to ‘school readiness’ has evolved into a particular and quite different construct in current discourse (Robert-Holmes, 2012). Something that the educators with whom I work are acutely aware of.

The revised EYFS framework is explicit that the adults’ overarching goal to ensure young children are ‘ready’ for the work of Year 1, although an explanation of the term is not provided in the documentation (Hood and Mitchell, 2017). It promotes, but does not define, teaching and learning which ensures children’s ‘school readiness’, their progress against expected levels, and their readiness for year 1 (DfE, 2012). Government policy and initiatives following the election of the Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010 provided the clarification. An urgent intensification and focus upon numeracy and literacy began, including a nationwide promotion of a prescriptive and systematic approach to the

teaching of synthetic phonics. A narrowing of early years assessment, along with increased inspection and surveillance increased pressure upon the sector.

This prompted what has become known as the ‘schoolification’ of early years education. The term refers to how in preparing children to be school ready, early years settings are required to implement a prescribed curriculum and focus on the development of children’s academic skills to the detriment of child-centred curricula and pedagogy (Brooks and Murray 2016; Ring et al., 2016). This was influenced by a global education reform movement, which promotes the standardisation of education; a foregrounding of literacy and numeracy in a narrowly focussed curriculum; low risk ways to reach learning goals; business management models for educational settings; reduced teacher autonomy; curriculum prescription and intensive assessment and performance procedures (Berry 2016; Hargreaves and Goodson 2006; Sahlberg 2006).

The impact of the schoolification agenda is of great concern to all those involved in the early years community. School readiness is now synonymous with a narrow focus on cognitive development and academic preparation for transition to Year 1 of schooling. The downward pressure on schools and educators to ensure that young children meet the required ‘good level of development’ is so great that approaches to teaching to achieve this end are more closely aligned to formalised teacher-centred methods commonly used in primary education (Bradbury, 2012; Smith, 2012). For example, a preoccupation with early drilling of skills and rote learning of academic skills such as reading, writing and counting ignores the fact that such skills in the absence of a context to apply them are of little value in learning (Ring and O’Sullivan 2016). The decoding and encoding skills employed in reading, for example, are quite different to the development of the disposition to be a reader (Katz 1993).

The methods designed to drill those skills deemed important by proponents of the schoolification agenda, tend to hinder children developing the dispositions needed to consolidate and apply them, which in turn leads to children being ill-prepared for the demands of formal learning. Whitebread and Bingham (2011) caution that such an



early emphasis upon very particular cognitive achievement and outcomes is inappropriate for young children who have insufficiently developed social and emotional skills. The teaching methods employed potentially negate the development of dispositions such as initiative, curiosity, risk-taking, self-confidence, engagement, persistence and enthusiasm, as children experience failure in completing tasks they are not developmentally ready for (Wilhelmsen 2016). The focus on acquiring a narrow range of academic skills is particularly challenging given that we now know that the development of these dispositions are a crucial component of intentional learning (Whitebread 2010). There is also a risk that the achievement gap currently identified as children enter formal school will be widened further. The teaching methods described above tend to favour children who already have an advantage in a developing skill or domain (Blair and Raver 2015).

More recently the proposed introduction of the International Early Learning Study (IELS), focused on measuring outcomes for children aged 4½ to 5½ raises further concerns in relation to the ongoing ‘schoolification’ of pre-primary education (OECD, 2017). Referred to as ‘baby PISA’ in the press, the IELS has the potential to create a situation whereby early years’ educators are pressurised to prepare children to achieve optimal levels of performance with reference to the IELS assessment foci which focus solely on mathematics and literacy. It is suggested that such assessment approaches decontextualise and pathologise children, teachers and schools (Lingard, Martino and Rezai-Rashti 2013).

My discussions with early years educators recounted in the Introduction are perhaps indicative of their experiences of the downward pressure exerted by the schoolification process. There is a growing tension apparent particularly in practice with three to five-year olds between current EYFS pedagogic guidance and the perceived standards agenda, which can encourage more formal, didactic or instructional approaches rather than play-based, relational approaches. An erosion in the play-based pedagogy in favour of outcomes driven teaching has undermined their long-held beliefs and made them question the validity of their passionately held child-centred principles. Their fears are echoed in the literature. Play appears solely positioned as a method for learning numeracy and literacy (PACEY, 2013), whilst

Faulkner and Coates (2013) express concerns about the possible restrictions to children's autonomy, their creativity and their opportunities to play out of doors.

September 2013 saw the launch of a public campaign by a group of leading academics, educators and education advisors. Those participating in the 'Too much too soon' campaign voiced similar concerns that the drive towards academic and cognitive outcomes, targets and attainment puts children's overall well-being and holistic educational experience at risk (Ang, 2014). In a response from the Department for Education (The Guardian, 2013) the campaigners' disquiet was referred to as a 'badly misguided lobby' and indicative of a culture of low expectations within the early years community.

Such a dismissive response perhaps underlines a message about the narrowly defined professional role and identity current policy has created for educators in the sector. A wider policy drive to professionalise the early years workforce, in particular those without qualified teacher status (QTS), has developed in tandem with the technical approach to teaching and learning espoused by the rhetoric surrounding the most recent modifications to the EYFS framework (DfE, 2017).

### **Professionalism and the professionalisation agenda in the Early Years sector**

In public discourse, professionalism appears to be an apolitical construct; one which is viewed broadly as a combination of occupational specialism, high standards, self-regulation and autonomy. Professionals have particular academic qualifications and training which confer status and thus belong to a particular community. Bringing about a professionalised workforce in the early years has perhaps been conceived as a straightforward process with an inevitably positive outcome (Woodrow, 2009), instead the process and discourse around it have been rather tense.

A number of heroic characterisations of early years educators have arisen from government policy and initiatives over the past 30 years. Those that saw early years education as a means of social remediation cast the workforce as redemptive; others

viewed them as parent substitutes at once providing a close, intimate relationship with the children in their charge and enabling parents to return to work themselves (Osgood, 2010). However, the establishment of the importance of social and economic investment in early childhood has led to an ideological shift in the way that early years education is viewed. The welfare state model has been replaced and early years education and care is seen as a commodity. According to Codd (2008) the state's investment in early years education, for example the Labour government's promise of the introduction of 15 'free' hours of education for children under 5 in 1998, is viewed as an investment in the human and social capital of the new global economy. As a result, early years educators now find themselves responsible for providing evidence to the public that such investment is justified. They need to prove that measurable and comparable results are produced and that they can be trusted to produce them in an acceptable and effective manner. This might initially be viewed as a favourable step, potentially empowering and elevating those educators in traditionally low status roles, but this does not detract from the fact that the professionalisation of the early years workforce is primarily a 'necessary mechanism to ensure accountability for the state's investment' (Duhn, 2014:136).

The professionalisation agenda in England largely focuses on 'upskilling' various members of the workforce. In this way of thinking it is assumed that the needs or deficiencies of the workforce might be addressed by a focus on technical competency training. This was intended to meet policy objectives, and political imperatives but also to strengthen the labour market and thus increase respect for the sector (Wood, 2009). This simplistic stance was evident in New Labour's reform of the mid 90s. A 'not good enough workforce' discourse was prevalent, focussing on those in the sector who did not have qualified teacher status (Osgood, 2006). An integrated qualifications framework (CWDC, 2005) was created with the aim to promote skills acquisition and promote career progression for those educators in the sector. Early Years Professional status (EYPS) was one such qualification, conferred after candidates met 39 competency standards with the intention to raise the quality and status of the workforce. Nevertheless, the range and variety of qualifications and the type and level of training required to work with young children remains confusing.

The drive to professionalise the workforce was given further impetus by the key findings of the EPPE project (Sylva et al., 2002). This demonstrates that educational outcomes for young children were best in those settings which successfully united cognitive and social development and also employed a graduate teacher. A review commissioned by the Coalition government recommended a strengthening of qualifications so that educators might have the essential depth and breadth of knowledge and experience to meet the challenges their job entails (Nutbrown, 2012). Qualifications introduced ‘to move decisively away from the idea that teaching young children is somehow less important or inferior to teaching school age children’ (Nutbrown, 2012: 6) were the ‘Early Years Educator’ level 3 role and Early Years Teachers (Graduate) role which replaced EYPS.

These new roles and qualifications produced some discontent within the early years community. The Early Years Teacher role has its own set of standards which, although focussed on younger children’s learning and development are very different to Qualified Teacher Standards. This qualification proved controversial for several reasons. Crucially it enabled those with the status to teach only in Nursery and Reception classes in school settings. The Association for the Professional Development of Early Years Educators (TACTYC, 2013) questions if this new qualification would result in educators who are paid less, have different terms and conditions of employment and fewer career opportunities than primary school colleagues, whilst private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings report that they cannot afford to pay a graduate and would not benefit from the scheme. There seemed little to encourage early years educators to engage with this training.

A more recent move to ensure that all members of the early years workforce hold GCSEs at Grade A-C in order to meet entry point for a new early years apprenticeship has also proved contentious with one provider noting a 96% drop in applications for the scheme (Osgood et al. 2017). The Pre-school Learning Alliance (2016) identify a ‘crisis’ in the PVI sector, one which involves a 10% drop in the number of educators with level 3 qualifications since 2015, where staff turnover is higher than in previous years and recruitment is proving difficult in general. Despite an overarching concern to create a graduate early years workforce and to ensure a

graduate leader in every full day care setting, Government agendas which demand more places for children with increased qualification levels appear to be endangering the sector (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010).

It appears that the ramifications of such training and qualifications is the creation of an environment where all educators, with or without QTS, no matter what their working context, are increasingly regulated by government. Early years education is reduced to ensuring specific measurable outcomes for young children (Payler and Locke, 2013; Miller, 2008; Moss, 2006; Osgood, 2006). Although many caution against the adoption of particular practices by the sector, that is to say, 'optimal behaviours as perceived by policy makers' (Wood, 2017:109) there is an increasing onus on educators to engage with approaches to teaching and learning far removed from traditional early years pedagogy.

Dominant notions of professionalism are implicit in the revised EYFS documentation (DfE, 2012). Despite the most recently amended framework apparently favouring a child-focussed approach to early years teaching and learning and an insistence in the non-statutory guidance that children progress at different rates and at different ages, educators in both statutory and non-statutory settings are nevertheless required to implement a curriculum which emphasises specific learning goals and statutory outcomes for the end of the key stage. The framework is explicit that the adults' overarching goal is that of ensuring young children are 'ready' for the work of Year 1. As such, this document seems to imply a particular role and identity for those working in this area, one which might involve a model of technical practice and be tightly regulated and subject to judgements in terms of performativity (Simpson, 2010).

The ongoing professionalisation process foregrounds a particularly narrow and prescriptive form of professionalism and with it a particular role and identity for all those working in this area, one which 'emphasises increased state involvement, accountability and performance targets' (Simpson, 2010:217). Traditional understandings of the role of early years educators which emphasise care and expertise in nurturing young children's learning and development are then in tension with neoliberal definitions of what it means to be an early years educator.

Such a view privileges particular way of teaching and interacting with children and reinforces narrow ways of understanding children's learning and development. Professional discourse is impoverished due to the unquestioned adoption of 'best practice;' having time and opportunity for reflection is of no importance therefore (Wood, 2017). A lack of criticality can give way to the fetishisation of particular resources, planning and assessment documentation, equipment and advice from curriculum guidelines or training materials by educators and the settings in which they work (Georgeson, 2009). These 'displays of quality' (Ball, 2001:210) might impress audiences such as Ofsted inspectors, prospective parents or colleagues from other settings but may not relate to other established ways of interacting with children and communities that have evolved over time or indeed to educators' longstanding and developing understanding of how to enact early education and care.

This conceptualisation of professionalism risks creating institutional and classroom contexts in which both educators and children must focus on demonstrating impact and improvement through imposed measures, benchmarks and bureaucracy in order to justify economic investment and leading to what Davis et al. (2014) describe as a hierarchical and stratified service. Osgood (2006) similarly predicts 'a situation whereby individuals increasingly judge and limit themselves to a normalised and conformist construction of professionalism' (2006:9) instead of demonstrating the type of professional autonomy often associated with the early years sector described by Brock (2006) as involving considered attitudes and values, ethical judgements, independence to interpret the best for children and families as well as commitment, enjoyment and passion for working with children in diverse contexts.

### **Contesting the nature of professionalism**

Although government and policy makers' constructs of professionalism are restrictive in nature, they are also contested. Critics of the professionalisation reform process (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005; Simpson, 2010; Duhn, 2011; Miller and Cable, 2014; Douglass, 2017) have urged those involved in the teaching and training of

early years educators to rethink this emerging view of professionalism. Oberhuemer (2005:13) particularly focuses on the necessity of questioning those prevalent notions of professionalism which act to ‘distance professionals from those they serve and prioritise one group’s knowledge over another’s.’ Their recommendations sit well with my own observations and aims for my research and spurred me on in my efforts to support educators develop their capacity to negotiate such a challenging environment.

My exploration of the context revealed the extent to which early years education and care is ‘enmeshed in international discourses about quality, effectiveness, cost-effectiveness, standards and accountability’ (Ang, 2014). The ramifications of this are not just felt at a socio-political or economic level but clearly permeate all aspects of the sector. It would appear that the educators with whom I work are directly experiencing the effects of policy in their perceived tensions about their role, the purpose of education in the early years and views about appropriate and effective pedagogy and practice. It was essential for my research that I try to understand these tensions and contrasts if I were to support them in attempting to navigate the spaces between established principles and ways of working with powerful and often contrasting policy messages and expectations. I recognised that the current climate could lead to a diminished conceptualisation of what it means to work in the early years and certainly there appeared to be a profound effect on some of the educators with whom I have contact. However, the policy context is only one factor that contributes to educators’ own sense of professionalism.

I felt keenly that I needed to understand more fully how early years educators come to perform or enact a ‘professional self.’ My research diary dated July 2014 shows I was concerned with:

*How do educators characterise themselves in their professional role as teachers of young children?*

*How do they come to view themselves in this way?*

*What conditions support the growth and maintenance of a positive view of themselves and their work with young children?*

*What role is there for professional learning opportunities in supporting early years educators in negotiating the challenging and changing political landscape?*

(Research diary entry, July 2014)

I had a growing awareness that this cluster of questions relates to the overarching concept of ‘professional identity,’ defined as one’s professional self-concept based on multiple attributes, beliefs, values and motives and experiences (Ibarra, 1999; Schein, 1978). This thinking directed an exploratory study which I undertook in order to understand how early years educators who have a multiplicity of qualifications, titles, roles and responsibilities and widely differing contracts, pay and working conditions negotiate and perceive their professional identities.

## **Conclusion**

In this first chapter I recount my examination of the wider landscape in which the early years educators carry out their work with young children and their families. The purpose of this was to help shape my understanding of the problems faced by my colleagues. The national context for my study has undergone considerable and significant change in the last 30 years. Reviewing these shifts clarified for me an opportunity to demonstrate the extent to which the sector and its workforce has been and still is being transformed as it tries to make sense of and respond to the continually changing political landscape and the prevailing professionalisation agenda. By scrutinising the policy context, I was able to recognise the ways in which it impacts individual educators in the ways they reported to me.

The early years sector is a complex organism. There remains a two-tier system in England and for many a conceptual division between education and care (Osgood et al., 2017). Within the community there are a relatively small body of teachers with QTS in maintained nursery and reception classes and a much larger body of educators with generally lower levels of training and qualifications working with babies to 3-year olds; members of the workforce deemed to be maternal and caring as opposed to those who are degree educated and highly trained. Pay, status and conditions for employees in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector are still generally inferior compared to those in the education sector who are perceived to



have more favourable pay, longer holidays and a shorter working day. Those working in the PVI sector lack a national pay scale or career pathway equivalent to their teacher or other professional counterparts in maintained settings. However, even within an EYFS classroom in a maintained primary or nursery school similar conflicts may also exist between colleagues. Policy stipulates that a 'school teacher' i.e. a person with qualified teacher status must be appointed to any reception or nursery class (DfE, 2012) but the team may include others with various roles, responsibilities, qualifications and conditions of employment and traditionally viewed as teacher aides. This current boundary between those who are teachers and those who are not provides a challenging context for the notion of professionalising the workforce. However, the two particular developments explored: the professionalisation agenda and particular approaches to school readiness affect all of those in the sector. This underlined the importance of a study like mine that aims to support early years educators' professionalism, and in particular, their capacity to negotiate the challenges and affordances that working in the sector presents.

The following chapter relates the exploratory study I carried out in the second year of my doctoral study.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Conceptualising professional identities**

In Chapter 2, I conceptualise professional identity, drawing upon the findings of an exploratory study I carried out in the first year of doctoral study. In the previous chapter I outlined my initial analysis of the context for my study, indicating the impact of the political climate and particularly the recent professionalisation agenda on the sector. I offered a critique of what is commonly understood as an apolitical construct; highlighting how these prevalent notions of professionalism impact on all those working in the sector. This analysis helped focus my thoughts when planning an exploratory study during the first phase of my doctoral study. Its overarching aim was to explore and understand how these particular members of the workforce who have a multiplicity of qualifications, titles, roles and responsibilities and widely differing contracts, pay and working conditions negotiate and perceive their professional identities. My intention was that by ‘listening to the separate voices and trying to hear their stories’ (Penn, 1998:14) it would be possible to explore the respondents’ professional identities and begin to understand the types and forms of development opportunities that I might develop to support practitioners in negotiating the early years sector landscape and making a difference in their work with young children.

In this chapter I provide an overview of that exploratory study, an account of which was subsequently published (Lightfoot and Frost, 2015). I begin with an attempt to clarify what is meant by professional identity and how this relates to those working in the early years sector in England. I reiterate the aims of the exploratory study, introduce the respondents and explain my approach to collecting and analysing data.

I then present a framework for understanding early years educators’ sense of professional selves. This consists three dimensions that support a robust professional identity:

- being valued
- having connections
- making a difference

These dimensions arose from listening to educators' own perspectives, noting the role of the landscape in which they work in terms of their institutional context, current policy directives and other influences which effect the ways and the extent to which early years workforce are characterised as 'professional.'

### **Conceptualising professional identity**

A first step was to explore the concept of professional identity. It is not straightforward; my exploration can be summarised by saying that it is inextricably linked to personal identity; it is not fixed but dynamic; it is multi-faceted and changes in professional identity are linked to the concept of human agency. These features are discussed in below.

The notion of professional identity cannot be separated from that of personal identity. Professional identity is not simply a matter of a role being adopted for instrumental reasons in the context of an occupation. It is not the sum total of attributes, beliefs, and values used to define people in specialised, skill- and education-based occupations or vocations (Benveniste, 1987; Ibarra, 1999). In short it is about who we are rather than the part we are playing. A person's professional identity is bound to be unique on the grounds that there are many antecedent and contributory factors. It has long been argued that identity is always bound to be a 'work in progress' rather than a fixed state (Erikson, 1975). Thus, we can come to the idea of a process of 'identification' which implies that human beings are continuously engaged in the enterprise of identifying themselves (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). A comprehensive review of the literature on teachers' professional identity supports this idea of identification being an ongoing process of interpretation and reinterpretation of experiences (Beijard, Meijer and Verloop, 2004).

Using the idea of identification immediately raises the question of the influences on that process which is where the concept of socialisation comes into play. Social identity theory tells us that we identify ourselves through membership of social groups (Jenkins, 2008; Tajfel, 1982). Stryker and Burke (2000) précis Mead's (1934) work on identity as 'society shapes self shapes social behaviour.' Identity is then malleable and dynamic. It affects our behaviour and is affected by the experiences we have. Canrinus et al.'s study (2011) draws attention to four indicators of professional identity: job satisfaction; commitment; motivation and self-efficacy. These are subject to three fluctuating dimensions which affect individual educator's identity as outlined in the figure below.



**Figure 2.1:** Indicators of professional identity (based on Canrinus et al., 2011)

Inevitably there are dilemmas and tensions involved in the construction and reconstruction of professional identity. Coldron and Smith (1999) found that teachers' professional identity, while being unique, nevertheless reflects the educational context or landscape that he or she is part of and it is in classroom practice where this becomes visible. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) argued that professional identity changes owing to shifts in this landscape, for example through policy change. These changes can be emotionally fraught as teachers attempt to maintain their 'story to live by'; a narrative thread that educators draw on to make sense of themselves and their practice.

Not only is professional identification a dynamic process but it also features sub-identities that may be more or less harmonised (Beijard, Meijer and Verloop, 2004). For some writers there is an emphasis on the struggle to define yourself when circumstances may appear to be demanding a different identity construction (MacLure, 1993). This may be linked to Eric Hoyle's (2008) discussion about the idea of teachers having a 'samizdat professionalism' as a strategy for being true to their values while satisfying externally generated requirements which might be at odds with these values. The idea that practitioners might be engaged in some kind of struggle for their identity suggests that a crucial variable here is human agency.

Agency is identified by Beijard et al., (2004) as being an important element of educators' professional identity. The idea of identity being a self-constructed phenomenon suggests that individuals have some capacity for agency. Bruner talked about agency as a defining characteristic of human kind and how it is second nature for us to engage in reflection and the construction of narratives about our 'agential encounters with the world' (Bruner, 1996: 36). From a sociological perspective, Giddens' structuration theory (1984) offers an explanation of the process by which social structures shape identity but are in turn shaped by the agency of individuals. This account is supported from a psychological perspective especially in Bandura's extensive work in which he talks about agency being realised through 'reflective and regulative thought' (Bandura, 1989). Reflection emerges as having a key role to play in enabling individuals to construct their identities and keep them under review so to speak.

These themes are also apparent in the more recently emerged area of research concerning professional identity of early years educators. Although the research aims and methodologies employed differ, studies indicate that professional identity is dynamic rather than stable and fixed in biology, and emphasise the social and discursive nature of these constructs (Davies, 1989; MacNaughton, 2000). Some do not provide a clear definition of the concept but highlight its close connection to a number of other features of professionalism which may be internal or external to the individual. These include discussions of:

- the interplay between personal and professional identities (Harwood, Klopper, Osanyin and Vanderlee, 2012)
- practitioner gender and class (Osgood, 2006)
- the role of reflection in identity construction (Bleach, 2014)
- the influence of national policy on educators' professional identity (Woodrow and Busch, 2008) and
- the media's portrayal of the early years workforce (McGillivray, 2008).

Various groups of practitioners have been the focus of research, including student pre-school teachers (Egan, 2004), nursery workers in private, voluntary, independent and state nurseries (Osgood, 2010), nannies, nursery nurses and childminders (McGillivray, 2008) and those with the more recent professional designations of Senior Practitioners and Early Years Professionals (Miller, 2008). What is evident from these differently emphasised studies is that the notion of a single or blended definition of professional identity in the sector is problematic.

Reflecting on the conversations with practitioners referred to in the Introduction, it seems plausible that the differences between these professionals' stories was perhaps related to the individuals' sense of agency as discussed above. Some practitioners were not as inhibited as others by regulatory changes and expectations. These individuals were active in pursuing their interests and talked about themselves and their work context in a positive manner. This raises the question of why these differences were so pronounced in certain individuals and what enabled them to act as they did. I reasoned that by listening to respondents' talk about their professional identities and the ways in which it might be construed, negotiated, sustained and contested I would begin to understand the types and forms of development opportunities that might support educators in making a difference in their work with young children.

## **The exploratory study**

As explained earlier, this study was an exploratory project in preparation for the next phase of my doctoral study arising from professional and personal interactions with educators. The aim was to ascertain educators' own perceptions, with accounts created on their own terms. It contributes to McGillivray's call for 'future research to seek the views of practitioners themselves in order to explore the complexity of factors that contribute to professional identity' in the early years (McGillivray, 2008: 252).

Consequently, the approach to the task of eliciting respondents' thinking about their professional identity was not approached with a firm theoretical perspective set prior to data collection. In keeping with its aims, the methodology for this small-scale study was interpretative and qualitative in nature (Creswell, 2007). Since interpretivist research focuses on experiences, actions and perspectives of those involved, a flexible and responsive was required from me. I was influenced by the work of Nias (1989) who pioneered the use of verbatim interview evidence gathered from a loosely framed set of questions to encourage long, discursive replies. This approach was appropriate because of its potential to generate rich data about the subjective, unique and changeable nature of educators' professional identities. It was also descriptive, presenting a multi-layered picture of relationships, settings and situations.

Brock (2012) notes how crucial the researcher role is in this type of study, not only in terms of eliciting a depth of thinking from the participants but also in understanding the context from which the responses are drawn. My 20 years' experience as a Key Stage 1 and EYFS classroom teacher, including time spent as a school leader, permeated this project in terms of its focus, the methodological choices made, my interactions with the participants in the study, and the sense I made of their responses.

I made use of my professional connections to recruit respondents for the study. The respondents who participated in this initial study work within four maintained and

one non-maintained settings in SE England. Many of the respondents were already known to me as ex- and current colleagues, so there were established working relationships with many of the participants. Some belong to an informal network I facilitated which according to Marianne, one of the participants, meets regularly in order to: 'share ideas, talk about practice have a cup of tea and let off a bit of steam.' Other respondents were members of schools where I have a connection through previous employment or via the HertsCam network.

Previous interactions with some of the respondents, particularly those involved with the network group, had involved wide ranging discussions and sometimes frank exchanges about the dilemmas and decisions faced on a daily basis by early years educators concerning their practice and relationships with other colleagues, parents and children. Therefore, I assumed with some confidence that the respondents would come to the interviews ready to share their experiences and opinions.

To discover the subjective identities and experiences of the educators a small range of qualitative methods were used including semi-structured interviews and follow up conversations by telephone and email. All but one interview was conducted on a one to one basis. The other was a paired interview with two co-workers. This gave rise to some animated discussion. Some telephone and email contact was made after the interviews for further clarification of a small number of points. Some of the educators also participated in an earlier focus group discussion that was carried out in an informal network meeting. Brock (2012) indicates that a supportive environment is key for stimulating the types of fruitful discussions sought. With this in mind, interviews took place in a variety of locations according to respondents' preferences, including a staff room, classrooms, an external courtyard and a local café. Some were during the school day and others after children had gone home. One took place during a weekend. Each interview took approximately 60 minutes, although the shortest was 30 minutes in length and the longest of 2 hours duration. The interviews were digitally recorded and partly transcribed. Notes were also made throughout, reflecting on the context of each interview. Informed consent was acquired from all respondents and a guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity was provided – all names used subsequently are pseudonyms.



The loosely structured interviews began with an invitation to: ‘tell me about your role here? Detailed responses followed and so I can say that the initial direction of the discussion was set by the educators themselves. By not imposing too stringent a schedule of questions, it was possible to attend to respondents’ perspectives about their professional identities. The questions asked varied from interview to interview as I helped respondents to unpick the detail of their stories and sought to uncover the factors that enabled or hindered them in their work in the sector. In order for me to facilitate shared understandings, I was aware that I needed to maximise those relationships already built with participants through dialogue and negotiation, practising those mentoring and consultancy skills described by Rhodes and Beneicke (2002).

There was a disparate mix in terms of age and ethnicity, however all ten participants were female reflecting the broader composition of the workforce. The participants occupied various positions and roles within their settings and had equally variable years of experience and qualifications; all worked with children aged 3 – 5 years at the later end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. One primary school headteacher was also interviewed.

### **Analysing the interviews**

The interviews were transcribed and the sorting, coding and analysis focused on exploring what was important for those educators who participated. Initially, reading and re-reading the transcriptions provided an increasing familiarity with the data. Highlighting themes, making notes and simple concept mapping helped to determine aspects of professional identity identified by the participants. This led to the formulation of 45 codes which began to generate greater insight into the respondents’ perceptions of their professional identities and how they might be shaped by their values, beliefs and experiences, their immediate working context and the wider national policy context. Further reading helped to make connections between these codes and these were grouped accordingly.

Eight major themes emerged from the data including:

- attraction and commitment to the role
- experiences of being a professional
- values held
- types of knowledge and understanding required
- degree of agency experienced
- need for support from the early childhood community
- influence of school contexts
- importance of training and qualifications

These themes relate well to the literature about professional identity, particularly Brock's (2012) seven dimensions of early years professionalism. However, although the identification of these themes was helpful, the initial analysis did not adequately capture the complexity of the participants' identities and the richness of their working lives. A fresh look at the data was needed to explore how professional identity is shaped and reshaped in a way that would do justice to the respondents who had contributed so willingly to the study but also help me understand the types of learning experiences that would support educators in their roles. The interview stories were re-examined searching for the commonalities that might integrate the important themes and unite all these educators' experiences, despite the differences in nomenclature, qualifications, personal biography and workplace. To clarify I was not searching for a coherent professional identity for those working in the early years sector but seeking to derive from the respondents' stories an understanding of the conditions that helped flourish and maintain a positive and secure professional identity.

Three overarching dimensions were very apparent. For all the respondents interviewed the following possibilities and opportunities had an impact on their professional identity:

- being valued
- having connections
- making a difference

These constituted an authentic representation of the respondents' perspectives and seemed to capture far more adequately the complexity of professional identity rather than the notions of professionalism offered by the policy climate outlined in Chapter 1. Each of these dimensions is now explained and illustrated with examples from the interviews to help demonstrate how they relate to educators' perceptions of professional identities.

### **Early years educators' perceptions of professional identity**

The three overarching dimensions are now used as an organising framework for a discussion of my findings.

#### ***Being valued***

The sense of being valued and its importance to the development and maintenance of a positive sense of professional identity runs like a golden thread throughout the interview stories. The respondents' stories all indicate their need for recognition; for their expertise; their personal qualities; that they do a worthwhile job and their aspirations for themselves and the children whom they educate and care for. Some of these aspects are outlined next.

This need to be valued is perhaps indicative of how those who care and educate young children have been viewed historically. Their work has been likened to that of 'baby sitters,' a low status role which mirrors the low status of children in society (Cohen, Moss, Petrie and Wallace, 2004). Such a view reinforces the stereotype that the education and care of young children is women's work; poorly qualified and poorly paid women at that. Unfortunately, this image is still perhaps compounded by the fact that education for those under 5 is non-statutory. This is illustrated by Lisa' comment:

*Nursery is viewed as just a bit of playing...there's no real education going on. We are just kind, smiling ladies playing with little children. They should see my professional development targets....*

(Lisa, nursery nurse in nursery class in a primary school)

Lisa highlights the conflict here between the type of dispositions often described as essential for the role such as 'caring,' 'approachable,' 'loving,' 'reliable' and hints at the ways in which such maternal qualities are often exploited or denigrated in the more technicist approaches currently used to demonstrate professional competence (Osgood, 2010).

What is evident from the data though is the way in which educators have come to make these aspects of the role their own. It does seem that the educators in this study do value these types of personal qualities and appear to invest heavily in the production of a 'caring self' (Skeggs, 2003). For Eleni this construct of what it means to be an early years educator influenced her career choice:

*You have to be patient and understanding. I am able to understand children. I can empathise with them. That's what makes me suitable for the job. That's why I became a foundation stage teacher.*

(Eleni, foundation stage teacher in a primary school)

Eleni's professional identity appears to be robust. She appears assured of her role and status and encapsulates this in the use of her title of 'foundation stage teacher.' The other teachers who participated in this study also described themselves in terms of the age group taught either as a 'foundation stage' teacher or 'nursery teacher.' All explained their route to QTS and mentioned the age range they had qualified to teach. There is a sense that they have earned their professional status and identity (Maloney, 2010) although as Sadie notes:

*I have met people who think I get paid less than secondary school teachers because I work with the youngest children in education system.*

(Sadie, nursery teacher in a primary school)

Those who participated in the study who are not qualified teachers used a greater number of terms to describe their role and position at their school, although they are employed on similar conditions and contracts as ‘keyworker’ for a number of children. Some role names derived from their initial training to work with children for example, ‘nursery nurse’ or ‘teaching assistant’. Others mentioned the job title on their contract, for example ‘early years assistant’ and ‘early years practitioner.’ The range of terminology employed even in this small-scale study demonstrates some of the complexity of knowing who the workforce is and how they should be known. Cameron (2004) makes the case for a unifying title to refer to those working with young children. However, this is a concern for a number of reasons for two of the respondents as relayed in this discussion:

*Lisa: I never call myself a practitioner. I always call myself a nursery nurse in a school...Practitioner...what a dry word. It sounds like it's nothing to do with children.*

*Nina: I still class myself as a nursery nurse, not an early years professional either.*

*Lisa: I feel like my identity has really been watered down...now you can do an NVQ in 6 weeks and have the same status as us.*

*Nina: There are so many qualifications now...no-one knows what any of them mean...or what they're worth. I worked really hard for my NNEB. It was a fulltime two year course.*

*Lisa: No-one uses the nursery nurse title any more though. It used to be really something once to say you were a nursery nurse. You had trained and specialised to work with babies and children to 7. You were seen as a professional. But now... It's become obsolete...people think we are all the same...I think we'll have to take more qualifications soon.*

Breadth in current nomenclature has given way to uncertainty and ambiguity for these two respondents. For them their professional identity is inextricably linked to the term ‘nursery nurse’. It was a worthwhile qualification; it signified a certain status and involved particular knowledge and understanding of young children. This title and their identification with the role is far removed from the ‘unfashionable’ term noted by McGillivray (2008) with its ‘connotations of a role that demanded no more than an ability to wash pots’ (McGillivray, 2008: 248). Lisa and Nina went on to discuss how they feel their role has been demeaned and diminished in recent years due to the training and qualifications structure currently in place. They felt that since

the role and title have less value this has impacted on their sense of being valued professionally in schools and in the wider community. Their growing sense of inferiority in others' eyes was saddening to hear.

Alison, a recently appointed primary headteacher who participated in the study, also noted the importance of names. She had found similar feelings of disillusionment among members of her support staff throughout the school, although none were nursery nurses. They confided that some of this dissatisfaction came from the different role titles in use and the perceived differences in status and role. Alison took a novel approach to dealing with the situation by altering their job title to 'assistant teacher.' This was positively received by her staff. Alison observed immediate changes in individuals.

*Just something simple like changing their titles. It's made a complete difference to the way they feel about themselves and their jobs. The atmosphere in school changed overnight. Now we can begin to develop practice with a positive mind-set.*

(Alison, primary school headteacher)

By making these initial changes with her members of staff Alison demonstrates her awareness that developing professionals who are committed to working with young children requires an inclusive and coherent identity in her particular setting (Adams, 2005).

### ***Making connections***

This is concerned with relational aspects of their experiences and how these shape professional identity. Educators emphasise their connections with children and families and with other members of the early years workforce in particular. Some participants also explored the extent to which their personal lives and characteristics are entwined with their sense of professional self.

In expressing their professional identity all participants drew attention to the emotional content of their work. In common with Egan's findings 'the language of care permeates their responses' (2004: 28). They talked of their 'passion' for their role and the need to be 'patient' and 'love for children and their families.' Alison, a

primary headteacher notes that all her staff characterise themselves to some extent as ‘being carers’ and ‘caring for children’ but describes her foundation stage teacher as especially being ‘like everyone’s mum’. Hargreaves (2000) similarly observes that the younger the children involved the greater the emotional intensity. However, a number of authors note how being perceived and perceiving themselves to be caring and maternal in their work has contributed to the struggle early years educators have to be recognised as professionals (Moss, 2006). Eleni’s comments reflect how she is overcoming ‘advice’ given during her PGCE training that was perhaps given with this in mind:

*At University they explicitly encouraged us not to get attached to the children. It wasn’t seen to be being professional. I spent the first few weeks of my NQT year trying to be distant from these tiny children, trying to follow this advice. It just didn’t work. It wasn’t me and it certainly wasn’t helping the children. I realised in fact I needed to be patient, to understand, to empathise....to be authentic. To show it, to use it.*

(Eleni, foundation stage teacher in a primary school)

Here she is engaged in the process of ‘reclaim(ing) emotion as vital and credible in early years practice’ (Osgood 2010: 130). Similarly, a number of those interviewed were keen to point out that for them there is no paradox between care and education. They do not appear ‘preoccupied with a regulatory gaze that denies them the use of their emotions to inflect professional practice’ (Osgood, 2010: 130). They do not seem to have to struggle as Osgood (2010) fears to find opportunities to interact with children and their families that demonstrate their professional purpose as emotionally reflective educators. Instead they deliberately make use of their personal characteristics as a means connecting to children and families.

*They are leaving their most precious thing in the world with you. You have got to show them that you care.*

(Nina, nursery nurse in a nursery class in an infant and nursery school)

For educators like Nina, making highly involved connections between children and their families is essential to their roles as educators. Emotional intelligence appears to these educators to be not only a desirable aspect of their professional identity, it is recognised as an inherent part of the teaching and learning process (Hargreaves,

2000). Such a high level of involvement is seen to be necessary in order to ascertain a child's needs and difficulties so that learning can take place:

*Being professional in the early years is absolutely about being attached and in tune with the children. Otherwise how will they learn?*

(Eleni, foundation stage teacher in a primary school)

So as with the participants in Harwood et al.'s study (2013:10) these respondents appear to be 'resistant to dichotomised ideas of care (ideal mother) and education (techno-rationalist).' Furthermore, some respondents' responses appeared to give glimpses of identities and perceived roles that go far beyond the care versus education debate.

*You need to be connected and have a nurturing relationship with children. It's important that you are the children's consistency – you let them know to trust you and then you can help. You've got to have that consistency then they start talking. If you have empathy and listen you can help them. I listen and then something...my brain erupts...I see something I can use. You have to show them it's ok to be a different colour, it's ok if you can't find the words...we need to prepare them to be resilient for the world.*

(Clare, early years practitioner in a children's centre)

Expending oneself in this way can be costly. Osgood (2010) notes the need for support for early years to sustain and nourish this aspect of professional identity. The respondents in this study draw attention to this noting how they often feel 'mentally not just physically tired' and 'vulnerable after giving so much every day.' They demonstrate their awareness of how the networks of colleagues to which they belong can help in these circumstances.

The networks take various forms: the foundation stage team of colleagues within the school; cluster groups which meet on a regular basis and online membership of early years forums. These connections and their impact upon the professional self are described in various ways. For Eleni, the opinions of her team members have affected views of herself as an educator:

*My teaching assistant has really helped with my confidence. Just little things she says like, 'the way you speak to parents is spot on...you'd never guess*



*you were in your NQT year.' She mentioned how my planning is really clear....I can just feel myself grow.*

(Eleni, foundation stage teacher in a primary school)

This feeling of validation also runs through Marianne's interview. Although she is a more experienced educator, she admits to having times when she feels uncertain about a newly introduced initiative, or in the face of an impending Ofsted visit.

*What I like is the backup, the feeling of solidarity and being with others with a shared ethos. I prefer the group input and the support of the network is brilliant.*

(Marianne, early years teacher in a primary school)

As hinted at by Marianne, the groups not only provide emotional sustenance. When prompted to explain what she meant by support Marianne added:

*I think with our cluster meetings with other early years colleagues that I learn the most. Our discussions are great and I always get new ideas. The clusters are a smaller group, we have input and influence the theme and so you get more out of it. We have a laugh or even a cry...*

(Marianne, early years teacher in a primary school)

These networks give educators an opportunity to compare stories of their current experiences, to reflect on practice that works and practice that is unhelpful. For some their developing professional identity is related to their membership of a community where they can interact with one another and recognise each other as participants (Wenger, 1998). Spirited debates take place about local and national policy. For example, during a discussion about documenting children's progress:

*Highlighting those sheets... It's so ridiculous. The development matters booklet wasn't meant to be for that... There's got to be a better way...*

(Sadie, nursery teacher in a primary school)

According to Sachs (2003) these types of communities can be forces to be reckoned with but the respondents seem content to focus on their daily work. Eleni's comment reflects this.

*I like the reassurance from the group to know I'm on the right track with journals, type of observations. Using that knowledge, I can make changes and bring what we do in line with others.*

(Eleni, foundation stage teacher in a primary school)

There seems to be untapped potential indicated here with glimpses of what Sachs (2003) calls the activist professional and which relates to the third theme, 'making a difference'.

### ***Making a difference***

This dimension highlights the importance all the respondents attached to a sense that they were able to make a difference to the education of young children in their settings; to the families with whom they worked; to practice in their settings and within local communities. The respondents offered many examples of the ways in which they were actively making a difference and so actively shaping their professional identity as individuals who matter to others.

Clare recounted a story of how she had worked intensively with one little boy over an academic year.

*At first, he just couldn't socialise and really couldn't cope with lunch time. I sat next to him every day... encouraging him, modelling what to do. Now he's so different – eats variety of foods, joins in activities. I saw him and his family in the town recently. So rewarding... seeing a family happy. I really like that part of the job...*

(Clare, early years practitioner in a children's centre)

What appears to be significant is that not only were they able to make a difference but they were able to do this in a way that satisfied their personal and professional values. Sadie explains in this way.

*I like teaching in the foundation stage because although you have the framework you can be creative. There's lots of flexibility and you can make decisions yourself about the curriculum, what you feel the children need, your learning environment, how you use the day...*

(Sadie, nursery teacher in a primary school)

Changes to national policy, overdue Ofsted inspections and time-consuming assessment paperwork were all mentioned by the respondents but they did not seem overly anxious about them. Marianne speaks for the majority when she explains this.

*Since 2006 there have been lots of changes. We are always having to move on and change and I'm really happy to do this. I feel there's always another way, something to explore or move on with. I'm really happy to have a go and go for it. Tracy [nursery nurse] tears her hair out though! I don't see that you can ever stand still...always something new and if it benefits the children and makes a real difference to them, then I'm happy to go for it.*

(Marianne, early years teacher in a primary school)

This comment echoes Brock's (2012) findings that educators were able to abide by their core values and beliefs whilst implementing policy and prescribed curricula. Sadie and Maria, both experienced teachers, managed to preserve their professional identity and professional practice as they negotiated imposed changes.

## **Conclusion**

The exploratory study I carried out enable me to listen to a range of early years educators and understand the factors both external and internal that shape their understanding of their professional identities. My findings were borne out by similar research undertaken in the area. Uniquely I was able to establish a number of conditions that the respondents identified as being key to the flourishing of a robust professional identity. These conditions are:

- being valued
- having connections
- making a difference

These conditions resonate with all the respondents regardless of their role, experience or place of work. I had previously established that professional identity is constantly evolving and being shaped by experience and reflection. I reasoned that those conditions that respondents defined as positively influencing professional

identity might then have implications for the development of a particular programme of support for professional development.

The support I envisaged would enable early years educators to develop a more agential orientation that enables them to negotiate the challenges and constraints inherent in their work with young children and their families. It would combat the stereotypical view of early years educators as ‘feminine child-carers’ and ‘passive-resistant workers’ (McGillivray, 2008) by ensuring they have at their disposal what has been described as ‘an opportunity to subvert and resist prevailing and dominant understandings of their professionalism’ (Osgood, 2006:12).

The exploratory study offered me a way to begin to conceptualise an alternative approach to support for professional development that draws upon and nourishes educators’ professional identities. This is explained in Chapter 4. However, before I offer my thinking about this, I relate, in the next chapter, an anecdote of my short-lived return to classroom teaching.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **A story of returning to school**

My growing understanding of what it means to be a professional educator in the early years sector was influenced not only by my interactions with early years educators and the exploratory study reported in the previous. A key event in my professional life helped me understand more fully how professional identities are formed and can be vulnerable in some contexts.

The anecdote conveyed in this chapter tells the story of my short-lived return to classroom teaching. It relates my reactions to a period in my professional life when I experienced great dissonance between my own understanding of what it is to be a professional early years educator and the perceptions of a particular school's leadership team. It was an unfortunate experience but one that helped me connect with the 'lived stories' (Connelly and Clandinin, 1999) of those colleagues I refer to in the Introduction. However, the experience did not merely help me empathise with fellow early years educators. My emotional response fuelled my determination to make a difference to the support provided for educators. The experience also marked a shift in my understanding about the ways in which professional identity may be enacted. I refer to this enactment as 'professionality.' I explore the concept later in this chapter and explain its relevance for the intervention at the heart of the study.

#### **The bear**

It was huge. Its head came up to my armpit. Its legs splayed out in an ungainly manner and it leaned to one side as it sat on the floor. Taking up most of the tiny room that was known as the library, it looked like an oversized prisoner in a cell. It stared at us with its hard, brown eyes. It certainly wasn't very appealing. Its fur was matted in places. My new colleagues and I looked at each other. 'He's got to go,' said Melanie. 'He's pretty scary,' said Susie. 'He just fills up all the room,' I said.

The enormous teddy bear could only be moved by two adults. We dragged him into the cloakroom where we were assembling ‘stuff’ to be thrown into the skip. I noticed the time. I needed to leave the classroom to start my home visits for the children who were about to start at the nursery in two weeks’ time. ‘You go,’ said Melanie, the nursery practitioner, ‘we’ll throw everything into the skip this afternoon.’

When I returned later that day, the cloakroom was clear. However, I walked into the classroom to find the bear had been reinstated in the library. Melanie appeared out of the cupboard. ‘He’s back,’ she trilled. ‘But why?’ I asked. ‘We were intercepted on the way to the skip. Mrs Fricker, the deputy head, says he has to stay. We’re not allowed to throw him out,’ came the reply.

It was the beginning of a new school year in September 2013. I had just started a temporary contract teaching in the nursery class of my own children’s school, Ash Vale Primary School. The three members of nursery staff team had all left the school at the end of the previous academic year and the head teacher had been unable to recruit a new nursery teacher. After visiting the school office on an errand one afternoon at the end of the previous summer term I found myself leaving the building with a job application form in my hand. I agreed to work part-time, initially for one term, responsible for the overall running of the 60 part-time place nursery class, but working four afternoons and one full day.

My professional life before I started the temporary teaching post at Ash Vale was always rich and fulfilling. My experiences, on the whole were tremendously positive and rewarding. I always found myself meeting and connecting with like-minded individuals. My connections always seem to lead to opportunities for professional growth and involvement in exciting projects that I would never turn down and I felt that the temporary job was perhaps the next such prospect.

Over the summer holidays I had delighted in the thought of my return to the classroom teaching and its apparent good fit with my family and new study commitments. I was relieved there would be no need for childcare for my own children. I imagined them playing in the classroom at the end of the day whilst I set

up for the next day's session, completed paperwork and so on. My four-year-old who was beginning full-time school would be in the adjoining room. His teacher, Mrs Fricker, the school's deputy head, who had taught my eldest son three years previously, would be my line manager. This entailed her having a responsibility for overseeing the work I carried out was satisfactory. I looked forward to being a 'real' practitioner again; part of a school community and back teaching the age range I loved, even if it were for a short time.

The reality was somewhat different. The hard-eyed bear began to symbolise my experience of returning to classroom teaching; one that had a profound effect upon my professional identity and clarified the focus of my doctoral studies.



(The huge bear in the small library space)

### **Understanding my experience of going back to school**

My experiences at Ash Vale did not contribute to or resonate with my view of myself as an innovative and wise educator. I found that my practice, my pedagogy, my decision-making ability and the relationships with my team members were questioned or denigrated almost every day.

My suggestions for improving the outdoor provision for children were met with shakes of the head and pursed lips. I attempted to rearrange the children's library in my classroom by boxing together books of similar genres or themes; pop-up books in one, dinosaur stories in another, fairy tales in yet another in order to help children

find, browse and return books only to be told that libraries should only be organised in terms of reference and nonfiction. I was informed I was using the wrong type of pen when annotating photographs of children's learning in their journals. If I attempted to explain my reasons for my choices I was told, 'That's not the Ash Vale way.' I recognise that these incidents are petty, even laughable with hindsight, but I had never encountered this level of micro management at any stage of my career before. The cumulative effect was wearing, frustrating and immensely insulting.

However, there were other incidents that particularly unsettled me and caused real dissonance between my professional beliefs and values and the 'professional' behaviour I was expected to demonstrate at the school. My new colleague, a nursery nurse of 20 years' experience and a former social services day nursery manager, had been observing children in the 'art and craft area.' She felt the layout of this corner of the room was preventing children from accessing materials and hampering their developing sense of independence. She suggested to me that she might alter the configuration of tables, racks and shelves. It seemed a very sensible idea and we spent some time rearranging the area. There was an immediate difference in children's behaviour. They were able to reach and select what they needed without asking an adult to help, the tables were a better height for them to work at comfortably and they were able to store finished creations independently. Later that week as I passed Mrs Fricker in the hall on my way home, accompanied by my own children. She stopped me to say that I was letting support staff make too many important decisions and needed to stop this. I was astonished, partly because of the tone of voice she used to chastise me in front of my children. However, I could not conceive how agreeing with Melanie about the layout of the learning environment and encouraging her to make the changes was anything but usual. I had worked in a similar way with team members for many years. Why would I ignore a sensible request from a vastly experienced and very observant educator? I was so shocked at Mrs Fricker's comments I could not reply. I returned to my classroom the following afternoon to find that the art and craft area had been restored to its former state.

A final incident cemented my decision that the school was not the right place for me to teach. I had completed that term's assessments of the children's progress.



Improving teaching and learning in mathematics was a whole school priority. Consequently, the nursery team and I had planned to maximise playful interactions and tasks with the children that involved early mathematical concepts, investigations and language. Our observations and assessments reflected some real progress for many of the children. However, my assessments were returned to me with a verbal message from the head teacher that I was overestimating children's abilities and that the assessments levels needed to be lowered and resubmitted.

The experience left me feeling wounded and embarrassed. Why was my practice so welcome in other establishments so emphatically rejected at Ash Vale? I was told pointedly that 'things had changed' since I was last a classroom teacher in 2006; that the 'school's standards were exceptionally high' as proved by their 'outstanding' Ofsted inspection in 2008. However, the glimpses of practice I could see both in terms of teaching approaches and learning opportunities in my colleagues' reception classrooms seemed to me to be somewhat impoverished. Children spent long periods of time sitting on the carpet listening to the adult. At other times the four adults could be seen, clipboards in hand, sitting at a table with one child each, the remainder of the class left to 'choose' from the toys and resources in the rooms.

Those close colleagues and friends in whom I confided had their own theories as to why the situation had occurred, centring on the idea that my presence there was somehow highlighting the inconsistency between the school's espoused approach in the early years foundation stage phase and their actual practice. Although their comments were intended to buoy up my dented confidence, the experience had a tremendously negative impact on me. I felt I had been misunderstood, constrained and somewhat belittled by the school's leadership team. I realised that for me, being accepted by peers, feeling that I belong and am valued in the workplace are significant, affective aspects of my views of myself as a professional.

I felt greatly shocked at my treatment at the school. My overriding concern though was the perhaps irrational fear that my child should not suffer any consequences. For this reason, I did not protest or try to justify myself any longer. I did not seek to renew the temporary contact after two terms.

On reflection I now see that this particular school has a strikingly different ethos to those I have worked at previously. This was manifest in the leadership style there which had great implications for the degree of autonomy afforded to me as a classroom teacher. I had always thought of myself as a robust character but found that my aspects of my professional identity that I valued highly, were compromised by the habitual practices and structures of certain aspects of the school culture and senior leaders' interpretations of the pervading policy climate. I reasoned how I enacted my professional identity was in direct conflict with the accepted notions of what it means to be a professional in that particular school setting.

### **Professionalism as the enactment of professional identity**

My conjecture seemed to resonate with MacLure's (1993) argument that identity is not merely something people *have*, but as something that they *use*, to justify, explain and make sense of themselves in relation to other people, and to the contexts in which they operate. My professional identity is characterised by a number of features in keeping with Canrinus' (2011) findings, such as: job satisfaction, commitment, motivation, self-efficacy. I reason that Mrs Fricker's professional identity is also related to these features. So why did we perform or enact our identities in such different ways? I considered that the differences between us might pertain to our conceptions of 'professionalism.'

Hoyle (1974) used this term to indicate knowledge, skills and procedures employed by teachers in the process of teaching. For him professionalism was either restricted or extended. He later expanded his early work.

*A restricted professional* was construed as a teacher for whom teaching was an intuitive activity, whose perspective was restricted to the classroom, who engaged little with wider professional reading or activities, who relied on experience as a guide to success, and greatly valued classroom autonomy. An *extended professional* was construed as a teacher for whom teaching was a rational activity, who sought to improve practice through reading and through engaging in continuous professional development, who was happily collegial, who located classroom practice within a larger social framework.

(Hoyle, 2008: 291)

This resonated with my experience. I was used to acting as an extended professional embracing the collegial aspects in my practice, working in early years teams in schools. These behaviours and attitudes are so much part of my identity as a teacher that it did not occur to me to temper my approach when I began to work at Ash Vale school. Mrs Fricker's teaching experience was limited to her work at Ash Vale. I realised that she acknowledged and particularly valued those aspects associated with a more restricted professionalism. By working in this way, she had created the particular ethos at the school over the past 20 years, rising from the post of newly qualified classroom teacher to deputy headteacher in that time.

A report commissioned by Ofsted (2009) seems to corroborate this more restricted view of professionalism. The report outlines approaches needed in schools to *become* an outstanding, *maintain* an outstanding status and how to move *beyond* outstanding status. Key characteristics of schools which achieve are deemed to be 'consistent staff behaviour' and 'assuring the quality of teaching and learning.' The report comments that when members of staff can be retained over periods of time within the same setting, they will become 'schooled' in practices and policies (Ofsted, 2009:15). From my observations and experience at Ash Vale school, ensuring such consistency of behaviour and practice was a key priority. This explains why it would seem common sense to senior leaders for them to be the decision makers when it came to apposite classroom strategies, including aspects such as the deployment of support staff, the position and use of furniture and fittings, the type of pen used to comment in children's journals, even the tone and pattern of voice used when speaking to children. For Mrs Fricker this was how consistency had been achieved, this was how an 'outstanding' judgement had been achieved in 2008 and my actions may have been a threat to this status.

This intense micro-management meant there were set ways of doing things and behaving. For a newcomer these rules were not explicit until an 'undesirable' action had been carried out, indeed I was told on several occasions, 'That's not the Ash Vale way.' Conversations with other more established colleagues at the school indicated that they seemed to know where and who they are by knowing their 'proper' relation to others. I, too, experienced that position in social space is

relational (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and had found myself in an organisation where I did not comfortably fit. It was an organisation where use of formal and informal power by individuals to achieve their goals within it was the norm. I did not know my place and so individuals sought to put me there by using their resources of power and influence in a particularly forthright manner (Hoyle, 1982). The ways in which the senior leaders' power was wielded resulted in a somewhat individualistic school culture with little collaboration or apparent trust between colleagues (Hargreaves, 2008). Staff morale appeared low. I came to realise that many colleagues, particularly non-teaching members of staff, were fearful of making decisions, disempowered and somewhat stressed. One teaching assistant even asked me 'Is it like this in all schools?' I understood why the nursery class teaching team had left the organisation at the end of the previous academic year.

I realised too, that what I had experienced was a continuation of institutional habitual practices; not necessarily a personal attack. The culture acted as a disabling condition. I felt very keenly what Palmer (2007) refers to as a 'divided self.' My sense of moral purpose was threatened by the school's requirements of me, by this I mean I could not act in ways that corresponded to my thinking, beliefs, values and assumptions. Although I could envisage other possibilities, I decided to retreat from the situation. Nevertheless, this episode in my own career helped me shape and move forward with my proposed doctoral research. I remained determined and convinced that there must be ways of helping educators to use their identities as a way of 'constructing and reconstructing the purposes and priorities in their work, both individually and collectively' (Hargreaves and Fullan, 1992:5).

## **Conclusion**

I followed DeVault's (1997) advice that in order to countenance charges of self-indulgence or narcissism, anecdotes such as the one I present here, should contribute to the process of refining the focus for study and be relevant to the broader intentions of the proposed research.

The return to school gave me first-hand experience of the problems and challenges encountered by the early years educators I referred to in the Introduction. The experience reinforced to me how much I wanted to understand and develop the richness and complexity of early years educators' professional identities in conditions where there is respect, mutuality and communication. I felt even more keenly that the conceptualisation of how educators acquire and use their identities and the notion of 'extended professionalism' had consequences for the kind of support needed from professional development opportunities. My premise was that if educators' professional identities can be shaped by 'society' then shaping the professional development opportunities I offer might potentially strengthen and help to reshape the professional identities of those educators who participate. This in turn should impact upon educators work with young children and their families.

I agreed with Chong's (2011:230) sentiments as she cautions teacher educators:

If not nurtured carefully... teacher identity can deteriorate or diminish. A strong sense of professional and personal identity will strengthen teachers' understanding of the demands and nature of their role. This process is best not left to chance and should be nurtured in supportive contexts.

My own experiences and the subsequent exploratory study furthered my understanding of the notion of professional identity and helped me appreciate the ways in which it might be construed, negotiated, sustained and contested. I understood that professional identities are non-static, changeable, dynamic and multi-faceted and that changes in their professional identities are linked to the concept of human agency. Although I intended my research would foster and nurture educators' professional identities, I wanted to help them use their professional identities to strengthen their capacity as educators in their classrooms, school teams and beyond. However, I did not want to characterise educators as being passive recipients of an externally conceived professional development opportunity. Crucially, I did not plan to carry out research *on* educators but *with* them in order to effect change in practice (Rudduck and Hopkins, 1985).

## **Chapter 4**

### **Support for professional development in the early years**

Previously, I considered the national context in an attempt to understand the impact of policy on early years educators' roles, the pedagogy employed and their experiences of working in the sector. I explored the concept of professional identity, drawing upon an analysis of the experiences of a group of respondents from the exploratory study I carried out at the beginning of my doctoral study. I went on to make a link between professional identities and the idea of professionalism; professionalism being the ways in which educators enact their professional identity. I proposed that the growth of educators' extended professionalism has consequences for the types of professional development programmes of support available to them. A consideration of the nature of those programmes is the final part of the conceptualisation that underpins my study. This chapter presents that conceptualisation and shows how it has influenced my plans for creating and leading an intervention to support the growth of extended professionalism for a group of early years educators. I use the phrase 'support for professional development' to indicate the programmes, opportunities and events with which educators may engage.

In this chapter I first discuss the difficulties involved with nomenclature used to describe both educators' learning and development and also the programmes of support on offer to help them develop the skills, knowledge and understanding they require. I explain how support for professional development has become commodified. Next, I review the support that is currently on offer for early years educators in England. The discussion is enriched by an analysis of the experiences of respondents who participated in my exploratory study. I contend that dominant modes of professional development impede the creation of programmes of support that are transformative in nature and might have a tremendous impact on educators' professional learning and the development of classroom practice. The final sections outline how I elected to go forward with an alternative approach of support that might potentially reshape the professional identities of those early years educators who participate, enabling them to enact a more extended professionalism.

## **Ambiguous terminology**

The language used to describe educators' learning and development is important. It can influence the ways in which policy-makers seek to guide and control educators' professional learning across the country. It can carry a particular message about what educators should know and their various skills. It can influence the nature and types of activities and opportunities available and shape educators' attitudes to them (Doeke et al., 2008). The term 'professional development' is fraught with difficulty because of the various concepts and understandings it represents. For example, the phrase 'professional development' might imply a process of becoming more professional over time as part of a developmental continuum (Fleet and Patterson, 2009). Such a conceptualisation ignores the complexity of professional growth, including the experiences, skills and prior knowledge of individuals; the diversity of workplace settings and the communities they serve and the interactions between individuals in constructing and sharing knowledge (Potter, 2001).

In England however, the term 'professional development' most often signifies the activities, events or opportunities that educators engage in rather than any actual process of development or learning educators experience. It is often conflated with the acronym INSET (in-service education and training). More recently the phrase 'professional learning' has been used (Timperley et al., 2007). This was a conscious decision to focus attention on the educator, rather than the provision of programmes and opportunities to support professional learning. Although such a discursive shift is welcome, it seems to have done little to modify the 'one-day-one-stop' approach to professional learning in the early years sector (Edwards and Nuttall, 2009). Professional development is constructed as a commodity. Professional development is something that is done to educators, with educators characterised as passive consumers of policy driven changes and innovations to pedagogy and curriculum.

## **The commodification of professional development**

In this section I consider how professional development has been commodified. Early years education is now firmly part of what Ball (2013) cynically refers to as a ‘global project’ to ensure economic productivity and competitiveness. The sector is viewed as an appropriate vehicle both to increase the female workforce and as a mechanism to reduce inequality by improving educational outcomes for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (UNESCO, 2006). These outcomes are considered to be directly influenced by the quality of the early years workforce, including their qualifications and training. Increasingly what is viewed as most influential is the quality of what educators do in their classrooms (Bertram and Pascal, 2014; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2006). Such arguments have resulted in standards for early years teachers, and practitioners with vocational qualifications, which broadly align to the standards for primary school teachers.

Such clear expectations seem plausible and at surface level relate to the idea of professionals having a specific body of knowledge and particular roles. It seems to me though that these standards appear to be less about developing professionals’ knowledge and improving teaching and learning and more about regulation. For example, within these standards are specific instructions about the use of synthetic phonics and the need for adult-led group activities. This is an apparent contradiction to the early years statutory documentation which advises a choice of pedagogical approach (DfE, 2004). The dimensions of professional expertise here are presented in behavioural terms; behaviours which can perhaps be quantifiably measured and deemed to be adequate or inadequate. If educators are judged deficient in any area, then a logical approach might seem to be to offer them training to remedy this. Locally this is known as ‘upskilling.’ Underpinning this way of thinking is the school effectiveness approach as espoused by Hattie.

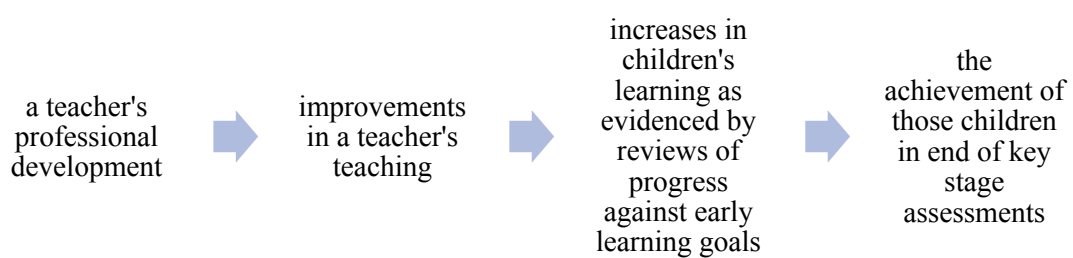
My search is driven by the goal of ascertaining the attributes of excellence – because if we can discover the location of the goal posts...the height of the bar...we then have the basis for developing appropriate professional development, the basis for teacher education programs to highlight that which truly makes a difference...

(Hattie, 2003: 1)



This type of thinking demonstrates how professional development has become commodified in the early years sector. There is an assumption that professional development can be directed externally to address educators' apparent inadequacies with a direct effect on their teaching and accordingly an impact on children's achievement. Training models or programmes are thus designed to address a perceived deficit workforce, rather than the development of educators as professionals in the sector (MacNaughton, 2005).

The logic of an input-output model of professional learning is seen below.



**Figure 4.1:** An input-output model of professional development and children's academic performance (derived from Supovitz, 2001)

The model assumes the following:

- There is a direct causality between educators' learning and the quality of teaching.
- Professional learning will directly and measurably impact on the quality of teaching.
- The impact of professional learning upon teaching can be observed and measured by children's increased progress toward set indicators of learning and development.
- The impact of professional development can be measured against children's performance in end of key stage assessments.

Undoubtedly, members of the profession may need some sort of input at various times in their careers, for example, understanding how to administer an EpiPen if a child experiences an allergic reaction or familiarity with a revised the procedure for administering the phonics test to children at the end of the Reception year. Rationalist knowledge and skills, recognised in statutory and regulatory frameworks,

have a place in educators' daily duties, but consequently the concept of professional development in the above model is reduced to a tick list of skills to be updated, courses to be attended and single 'fix-it' sessions (Patterson and Fleet, 2001). In addition, the unquestioned adoption of the externally created 'best practice' implied in Hattie's rationalisation negates the sensitivities and relationships that educators have built up over time to meet the particular needs of the children, families and communities they and their settings serve (Georgeson, 2009).

I contend that such a transmission approach to can be an obstacle to educator learning and development. It casts educators not only as technicians, but also passive recipients of training events (Sachs, 2003). In valuing the input of knowledge from outside educators' settings, it negates the professional knowledge educators have developed within their settings (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993). A technical approach to professional development does not take into account, or nurture, those features of professional identity that the respondents in my exploratory study highlighted. It does not account for the rich complexity of educators' working theories which are embodied in their practice (Blaise, 2009). It fails, too, to acknowledge the type of extended professionalism I explored in later in this chapter, which features moral purpose and agency as central to educational enterprise (MacBeath and Dempster, 2006). Instead it assumes educators are unable to bring about educational improvements or change.

I explore educators' experiences of support for professional development in the later sections of this chapter. Prior to this, I problematise the sense of entitlement to professional development enshrined in the statutory framework for the early years education sector (DfE, 2014).

### **Entitlement to professional development opportunities in the early years**

In common with many national governments, in England, we have moved towards a common, statutory framework DfE (2014) which is applicable to all settings and organisations providing education and care for children up to the age of five. The

following assertions about the qualifications, training and professional development of the early years workforce are found in the document.

A quality learning experience for children requires a quality workforce. A well-qualified, skilled staff strongly increases the potential of any individual setting to deliver the best possible outcomes for children (DfE, 2014:10).

Providers must support staff to undertake appropriate training and professional development opportunities to ensure they offer quality learning and development experiences for children that continually improves  
(DfE, 2014:20).

There is recognition that there should be opportunity for professional development over and above mandatory training, and the sense of entitlement is welcome (Nutbrown, 2012). However, for me, the statements are problematic on at least four levels: the onus of responsibility placed upon providers, a lack of clarity as to what is meant by appropriate, the implicit and impoverished characterisation of the early years workforce and the assumption therein about the nature of professional knowledge. I consider each of these.

### ***Responsibility***

The notion of entitlement seems to rest on the assumption that providers of early years education are solely responsible for ensuring early years educators are able to access ongoing training and development. Who are the providers in the sector? Some nurseries are privately owned with managers appointed to the overall task of leading the setting. Some community nurseries are committee-led, often by groups of parents. Childminders are self-employed. Nursery schools, and nursery and reception classes in primary schools operate within the maintained sector, some of which might be academies, independent of local authority control. Whatever the case, there is a presumption that those responsible for leading and managing early years education settings are able to access and then differentiate between the vast array of opportunities available to decide what is ‘appropriate’ for their employees. It perhaps supposes that all professional development opportunities are of equal worth and value. Osgood et al. (2017) similarly point out that a lack of impartial information about professional learning and development opportunities and their

providers, their value to employers and usefulness to early years educators only serves to undermine the situation.

Ofsted (2014) claims that the best early years settings make decisions about the types and forms of support for professional development their staff members require, based on data about children's progress. Despite this finding it appears that providers actually have little support in recognising where best to place their efforts for professional development opportunities and how best to use the limited funding available for this. The result appears to be that most early years educators do not appear to have access to adequate long-term resources to support their professional development (Edwards and Nuttall, 2009). This situation is perhaps exacerbated by the lack of a system-wide approach to supporting providers of early years education with decision making, as was previously possible with the support of local authority consultants, who knew their local settings and catchment areas well (Payler and Waters, 2015).

As explained previously, the early years education sector comprises a workforce that varies greatly in its makeup. This workforce educates and cares for young children in a diverse settings and diverse contexts, including maintained schools and the voluntary, independent and private sector. A large proportion of provision falls within the private, voluntary and independent sector (PVI) which caters particularly for babies and children younger than two or three years of age. While qualification levels in the PVI sector have risen, it is still the case that a sizeable proportion of early years educators are not graduate teachers. Such a two-tier system of early years childhood and care in England has ramifications for public perception, financial remuneration and career progression in the sector (Osgood et al., 2017). It also has distinct implications for professional learning and development programmes which need to cater for and encompass educators from a range of contexts, experience and qualification levels. This brings additional challenges in terms of costs, regulatory systems and membership of organisational networks, all of which frame possibilities for what may be deemed 'appropriate' professional development opportunities (Hordern, 2013).

### ***Appropriate training and professional development opportunities***

There is no explicit definition of what constitutes ‘appropriate’ opportunities and the nature of the training and professional development is not specified further in the statutory document, but there is the suggestion of a causal link between educators’ ongoing training and level of qualification and increased service quality and improved later educational outcomes for children. It is perhaps unfortunate that research supporting this link (Hillman, 2015; Mathers, 2011; Aitken and Kennedy, 2007; Gammage, 2006) has been seized upon by politicians in England to support policy driven initiatives to improve young children’s ‘school readiness,’ a focus on four-year-olds academic performance in mathematics and literacy and efforts to loosen restrictions concerning child adult ratios (Wild et al., 2015). Professional development is understood purely as a key strategy for the implementation of policy. With this at the forefront of the government agenda to raise ‘quality,’ particular forms of qualifications and training appear to have precedent over others. This deficit view of professional development, discussed in the introduction to this chapter, is also advocated in various government publications and by numerous professional development providers such as the following excerpt from a county council in England.

We encourage professional development in practitioners so they can meet the statutory qualification requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage as well as the Ofsted Childcare Register and other relevant legislation such as health and safety and food hygiene.

(<https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/childcare-professionals>)

This type of assertion leads Osgood et al. (2017:10) to note that in England forms of professional development and learning which promote upskilling and the growth of ‘technical competence and the delivery of prescribed outcomes are favoured over those which focus on developing agency, critical thinking and reflexivity.’ This is markedly different to other OECD countries (OECD, 2012) where professional development opportunities are expected to be relevant to local communities and setting context. Approaches which are deemed successful are those which focus on facilitating practitioner reflection, leading to marked increases in pedagogical understanding and in turn to action that develops practice. These type of

professional development activities have more in common with what Rodd (2006) defines as lifelong learning; opportunities which strengthen educators' effectiveness in their role by supporting them to make use of characteristics such as curiosity, a willingness to learn and develop hope, inspiration and high expectations of themselves and others. This is in sharp contrast with the way the early years education workforce is characterised currently in England.

### ***Characterisation of the early years workforce***

The message about what it is to be a professional in the early years foundation stage in England is implicit but clear in both the professional standards and the statutory framework and accompanying policy documents. Not only are early years educators expected to provide quality learning experiences, they are charged with ensuring children achieve predetermined, assessable developmental outcomes outlined in the framework. Ofsted's definition of 'school readiness' with an emphasis on preparing young children to conform to the demands of a formal school curriculum and particular routines further constrains how early years educators are judged to be effective in their work with young children. They are construed as instructors and so opportunities for them to engage with professional development and learning opportunities that enable them to question and engage with their practice, to develop a critical awareness of their local and national context are unnecessary. Indeed, such opportunities have been described to me as 'cherries on the top' or 'navel gazing luxuries' by senior consultants from one county council in England.

A further challenge implicit here lies in the notion that educators will move from being less professional to more professional as part of a developmental continuum as their deficiencies are addressed (Fleet and Patterson, 2009). This simplistic view has its origins in the behaviourism that has dominated thinking about teaching and learning for decades and which is at odds with MacNaughton's view that 'the most effective professional learning is collaborative, action-focused, dialogical and critically reflective' (MacNaughton, 2005:198).

### ***What counts as professional knowledge***

Professional knowledge and related practices would appear to be something that can simply be transmitted and put into action with positive effect via training activities. This is surprising given the advancements in our understanding about the nature of professional knowledge and the ways in which it might develop and be shared over the last five decades (Frost, 2012). Simplistic training models do not take into account Kolb's (1984) concept of experiential learning or the role that reflection plays in the development of practice (Schon, 1983). They do not acknowledge learning from either 'non-formal' or 'deliberative' experiences (Eraut, 2000) or planned processes intended to make 'tacit knowledge' visible and shareable (Polanyi, 1966). Given the emphasis on 'sustained shared critical thinking' that early years educators are required to incorporate in their pedagogical practice with children, it is difficult to understand the dominance of such narrow approaches to adult learning in government publications and statutory documents. There is no sense of early years educators as active and reflexive agents, no mention of the professional identities they bring with them in terms of their 'individual dispositions and emotions, day-to-day lives and relationships, training and education' (McGillivray, 2008:246). This multi-faceted professional identity seems to be at risk. The professionalism privileged here has an individualistic focus, the orientation is one of compliant implementation and the drivers are standards, rules and outcomes (Frost, 2017). It would appear that reduced conceptualisations about the role of early years educators forms an inadequate foundation for thinking about what constitutes professional learning and development in policy frameworks (Skattebol, Adamson and Woodrow, 2016:129). I was eager to ascertain the views of early years educators about their own experiences of the process of professional development. This was part of the exploratory study referred to in Chapter 2. I present an analysis of their reflections next.

### **Early years educators' experiences of the professional development process**

The exploratory study focused upon the experiences of nine of early years educators who work with three to five-year olds in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

in maintained primary and nursery schools and a primary headteacher. Its overarching aim was to explore and understand how these particular members of the workforce who have a multiplicity of qualifications, titles, roles and responsibilities and widely differing contracts, pay and working conditions negotiate and perceive their professional identities. The premise is that those factors respondents define as influencing professional identity have implications for the ways in which I aspired to support them through professional development opportunities. Therefore, I was also interested to hear about respondents' experiences and views of their own professional development. Again, my interviews with the respondents were based on a loose set of questions beginning with an invitation to tell me about their professional development over the course of their careers, any frustrations or challenges encountered but also more positive experiences. I present the respondents' responses according to these three broad categories, indicating how my analysis relates to my thinking and planning about my proposed intervention.

### ***Experiences of support for professional development***

Each of the respondents in my exploratory study appeared to equate the term 'professional development' with activities and programmes, rather than the development of themselves as a professional. They talked about CPD (continuing professional development) and INSET (in-service education and training), local terminology for organised events and activities that they participate in as part of their contractual obligations. Such an understanding of professional development relates to a commonly held assumption referred to earlier in this chapter that professional development is restricted to the delivery of planned programmes with purpose of improving the performance of individuals (Litjens and Taguma, 2010). As the interviews progressed, respondents increasingly commented on a wider variety of opportunities. These were both planned and unplanned, some and some were self-chosen or voluntarily attended. Included were activities in their own or others' classrooms or settings, membership of various networks, including virtual and online ones, links with professionals from other disciplines and spontaneous opportunities such as brief conversations with colleagues.



The respondents recognised the many and varied forms that support for professional development takes. Many referred to:

- shadowing or observing colleagues in their own setting
- local cluster groups run by colleagues
- reading blogs, tweets and belonging to Facebook groups
- visits to a local teaching school
- forums led by local authority consultants
- conferences and lectures
- accredited courses such as masters degrees and Forest School training
- meetings in their own settings led by colleagues
- training events such as paediatric first aid courses
- discussion with colleagues before, during or after the working day.

These responses suggest that the early years educators had plenty of opportunity and organisational support to avail themselves of a wide range of professional development activities. This is somewhat contrary to Hordern's (2014) concerns that the current situation, with respect to the professional development in the sector, is characterised by limited employer involvement and a reliance on formal training courses. However, all of the respondents worked in the maintained sector, so it might be that this group belonged to institutions with specific, ringfenced funding for professional development. Early years colleagues working in the private, voluntary and independent settings are reportedly not as fortunate (Osgood, 2010). Indeed, one participant drew attention to a lack of parity across the sector with respect to access to professional development opportunities.

*None of us here ever have a problem accessing professional development. When we talk to other practitioners in different settings we realise how lucky we are. As a setting we are blessed because if we find something we are interested in – the support is there. Finances are tight...but we have a headteacher who's very proactive.*

(Sue, early years practitioner at a Children's Centre)

Crucially, Sue highlights not only the financial implications involved but indicates the key role played by those in positional authority in accessing professional development opportunities. In many cases this was a head teacher or member of the senior leadership team. For many of those interviewed, professional development opportunities were identified as being connected to an ongoing performance management process, whereby school leaders encourage, recognise, reward and develop good performance and challenge marginal and underperformance, in their workplace.

*Our CPD is really supposed to link with our personal targets and what we think we need to do or learn more about. Training should be linked to the school development plan so we're told.*

(Sadie, nursery teacher in a primary school)

Sadie found that the upskilling approach to professional development, explained earlier, was more common in her current workplace than in her previous settings. She felt this focus was related to the outcomes of a less than favourable Ofsted inspection which highlighted some teachers apparent lack of subject knowledge.

Other responses demonstrated that bureaucratic processes such as performance management, could be used in a more positive way. Eleni's response indicates some level of decision making was available to some early years educators, but the upskilling focus still determines the nature of the support for professional development.

*We have performance management every September – it's for looking forward. You have an opportunity to talk to the head or deputy about your interests and build upon them. You can then attend courses or training that fits with your needs.*

(Eleni, foundation stage teacher in a primary school)

One teacher noted a very different approach. Unusually, for the group interviewed, she and colleagues at her setting appeared be in charge their own professional development.

*Largely we are responsible for our own development but the headteacher will come through with emails or perhaps pass information onto a certain individual, if she thinks it's something useful or something that'd interest you.*

(Clare, early years practitioner in a children's centre)

A similar sense of individual responsibility for their own professional development was demonstrated by many of those interviewed when they recalled attending events and programmes voluntarily, in their own time and often at their own expense. Some individuals were particularly proactive at involving themselves in self chosen professional development opportunities outside of their contracted hours.

*I look at the ABC blog and things like that...Pinterest is great – so many ideas. I do spend quite a lot of time at home on the computer following blogs – some are really useful and inspirational. They give you the impetus to be creative and have a go.*

(Maria, early years teacher in a primary school)

*I went to conference on a Saturday – but that's my choice.*

(Sue, early years practitioner at a children's centre)

These individuals are managing to some extent to be active agents of their own professional growth as recommended in a recent international review (Schleicher, 2012).

#### *Positive experiences*

All respondents were keen to share their positive experiences of professional development activities and opportunities and the particular aspects of these events that made them useful or effective in some way.

Many of those professional development opportunities deemed to be useful or effective by respondents in the exploratory study involved being a member of a group or network, known locally as clusters. These clusters might be comprised of colleagues working in a particular geographical area or involve those with a shared interest.

*There's a moderation cluster I go to. We get together, compare approaches and talk. I feel I pick up ideas from that – more than just the how to do moderating aspect! What I really like is the backup, the feeling of solidarity and being with others with a shared ethos.*

(Marianne, early years teacher in a primary school)

*Clusters are the ideal...especially the twilights. We choose what we want to discuss. With day course I'm wary of being out of the classroom and I don't want to sit and be talked at in a room somewhere in Stevenage.*

(Clare, early years practitioner in a children's centre)

Such situations appear to be positively received because agendas are set by the educators themselves. This sense of ownership over the development process depends on secure relationships and climates which nurture the possibilities of making connections with others. Alison, the only headteacher interviewed offers her thoughts about this.

*What's unique about the cluster group is the relationships that build up over time. Yes, you can go on a course and even visit and observe in another school but because the relationships in the group... it seems natural and free flowing. Not embarrassed to ask silly questions. We bring back loads and put aspects back into practice immediately.*

She goes on to say how she used this as a strategy for providing conditions within her own school to build similar professional capital.

*I've really focused on giving teachers more time out. I have specialists in to cover. Now the entire early years team are all released at the same time for one afternoon per week.*

*Previously it was just the teacher completing the learning journals, doing the planning, with little impact from the others. Now the whole team have ownership. Observation, assessment, planning is a perfect cycle for the whole team to be involved with. One practitioner can't see everything you need the whole team. This approach takes away any feelings of panic and solitariness, particularly around making judgements about children's progress.*

(Alison, primary school headteacher)

Alison demonstrates her appreciation of professional development opportunities which take into account evaluation of both individual educator's needs and the priorities of the school. Her strategic approach demonstrates the role of senior leaders in developing and sustaining a culture of professional learning in schools (Senge 1999). Her method and responses from others in the exploratory study reveal how effective school leaders are first and foremost learners themselves, developing ways to support and manage the school as a learning organisation (Sergiovanni, 2005).

Other respondents also referred to 'inhouse' opportunities for development.

*Our school inset is always useful – we were looking at multiplication and division recently. It gives me an opportunity to talk to the rest of the school staff about how we introduce these concepts to young children in the early years foundation stage. I've had also had opportunities to explain about Forest School and there's a regular slot for early years input.*

(Marianne, early years teacher in a primary school)

These types of opportunities appear to be immediately relevant to educators. It perhaps indicates the need for support for professional development to build on and connect with their existing knowledge bases. Baird and Mitchell (1997) similarly argue that teachers are more likely to engage in deep learning when they can see the relevance of such programmes to their professional practice. This is in contrast to the traditional assumption such opportunities would be merely self-serving unless teachers' learning must be directly connected to children's learning (Supovitz, 2001). In-house opportunities are supplemented in a number of ways. Maintained and non-maintained settings maximise their links with local teaching schools.

*Most of our CPD work is through our connection to the local teaching school. We don't use the courses from county anymore.*

(Eleni, foundation stage teacher in a primary school)

When pressed to explain this preference the respondent cited lower costs to be the main reason, however there was also a sense that external input might come at a different cost.

*At the teaching school we have sessions led by practising teachers rather than teams of consultants. They (the teachers) focus on practice rather than trying to get us to jump through hoops to keep county happy.*

(Eleni, foundation stage teacher in a primary school)

The literature shows that some forms of collaborative support are insular. It might perpetuate certain practices without encouraging the development of new ideas and meaningful learning for participants (Bolam et al., 2005). However, Eleni's response implies that these experiences are valuable. Instead of the 'top-down' approach where knowledge and skills are imported and externally transmitted to educators, she implies that knowledge is being generated at a local level. In a similar way, observations of practice at local teaching schools also seemed to imbue a sense of ownership and positivity about risk-taking in developing practice. As one nursery teacher put it

*I visited the nursery teaching school recently and they really inspired me to follow children's interests rather than set topics. I'm trying to change the way we've done things for years.*

(Marianne, nursery teacher in a primary school)

Several respondents also noted opportunities for observing colleagues as opportunities for learning within their own organisations. The respondents rated highly those types of opportunities when they had time to watch, to compare and consider pedagogy, relationships learning environments. Such activities perhaps provided respondents with a chance to have their thinking challenged as part of changing their practice.

*Every so often we get to spend time in each other's rooms or observing another member of our own team.*

(Colette, teaching assistant in a reception class in a primary school)

*We also have peer to peer observations – so we watch and give feedback and have an opportunity to reflect.*

(Marianne, nursery teacher in a primary school)

Colette and Marianne's responses show how adequate support for resourcing and time for reflection assist their engagement in professional learning (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

Other forms of support are given as examples that enable educators to reflect on challenges and problems in their practice. Alison, the primary headteacher draws on her own experiences again to provide support for her school staff, including teachers and teaching assistants in the early years.

*The best CPD that I have invested in this year has been a coach for the staff. I wouldn't be in the job I am now if it hadn't had been for a number of mentors I've had over the years and so why shouldn't my staff have the same sort of opportunities?*

(Alison, primary school headteacher)

Having particular experts lead professional development events seemed to be positively received by some respondents. I offer several of the respondents' examples before considering what is particularly noteworthy about them. Clare animatedly recalled

*Catherine Holt a story teller came to one staff meeting. She read a children's story book to us as a staff. We had to reflect on all the ways that made this an engaging experience for us as an audience...the way she sat, how she held the book, her eye contact, the characterisation, you know... and then she came back during session time and watched us reading to children and gave feedback.*

(Clare, early years practitioner in a children's centre)

Sadie remembered an event from the beginning of her long career.

*I attended a year -long course – it was in Haringey and led by Tina Bruce. She really inspired me with a proper early years' ethos. We were taught in blocks of time and there was a project of our own choice to complete. She was all about what the children's needs and interests were not the box ticking that we have now.*

(Sadie, nursery teacher in a primary school)

What was it that made these opportunities so well received? It might be that connecting practice development with a source of external expertise results in

effective professional development (Husbands and Pearce, 2012). These experts are seen to be promoting practices that are recognised and recommended within the field of early years education (Buysse et al., 2009). What strikes me though is that these opportunities did not appear to rely on a transmission approach. They have much in common with traditional early years pedagogy, such approaches view children as strong, competent learners and here adult learners are recast in a similar light. Learner strengths are acknowledged. Peer support is enabled. Content is relevant and situationally-based.

A programme of longer duration also is viewed as supportive by Fleet and Patterson, (2009) and several educators related the value in such courses and opportunities.

*I had a secondment to work with the health team and worked with a paediatrician which really stepped up my interest in children's physical development and how it relates to learning in general.*

(Clare, early years practitioner in a children's centre)

*Jan White has been here giving us training about outside play and creating the environment. It was truly inspirational... She's an exciting presenter, but the whole thing was vibrant and interesting. It was five days spread over two terms and just the four of us.*

(Marianne, nursery teacher in a primary school)

Respondents in the exploratory study pinpointed a range of other experiences as particularly key in their professional development. All of these programmes, events and activities employ supportive strategies that draw on a broader understanding of the ways in which adults learn best (Knowles, 1984). Sadie's comments indicate the need for a climate of collaboration to learn effectively.

*I prefer the group input. My needs have changed over the years and the support of the network is brilliant.*

(Sadie, nursery teacher in a primary school)

Being a member of a community of other learners is often seen as inevitably positive, according to Grossman, Winebug and Woolworth (2001). The literature promoting professional learning communities demonstrates how learning and development is enhanced by teachers 'sharing and interrogating their practice in an



ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning oriented, growth promoting way' (Bolam et al., 2005:5). The respondent did not offer any detailed information relating to these aspects, for her the group gave her a sense of belonging and an opportunity to talk to like-minded individuals.

In contrast, diversity is recognised and celebrated in approaches deemed effective by some respondents

*Other practitioners have different ways of handling behaviour or setting up activities – you learn different approaches and strategies from watching each other. It doesn't really matter whether they are a teacher, a TA... whatever. Some things might be relevant for your own settings and your children and others aren't but it's important to see that.*

(Colette, teaching assistant in a reception class in a primary school)

Educators, such as Colette, appear to sense that there is not necessarily one best way to approach teaching and learning, despite the rhetoric of some government guidelines and documentation. Professional development opportunities which take an inclusive approach, value and support the wide range of individuals who make up the early years workforce, those with a range of ages, cultural heritage, experience, opportunity and power. They do not presume to predict what individuals with particular characteristics e.g. educational qualifications or ascribed positions might need, nor do they deify those in positions to support others (Fleet, 2009).

Intrinsic factors also appear to play a role in adult learning. Sue's incentive to be engaged with professional learning appears is inspired by her personal passions.

*I'm doing these masters modules as part of my professional development. I'm driven by my passion for the outdoors and the environment. I'm interested – if it motivates me then I hope it will motivate others.*

(Sue, early years practitioner at a children's centre)

For Sue development opportunities not only enriched her professionally but were viewed as an opportunity to enthuse and develop colleagues' practice.

A bias towards problem solving as a learning activity was evident in some responses.

*It was a fabulous to have the time to tease apart what's important in terms of physical development and think about how this ties in with what we do with our very young children.*

(Clare, early years practitioner in a children's centre)

Such opportunities to work through professional tensions and questions arguably strengthen not only respondents' confidence and their sense of self (Bleach, 2014) but provide space to question taken for granted practices and the contexts in which it occurs (Reid, 2004).

Finally, practical relevance is a significant factor in gaining commitment but also supporting early years educators in developing their practice and pedagogical repertoire.

*I chose that course because want to do something outdoors, environmentally driven, something practical and relevant. Training for me needs to be practical...visible... make a difference.*

(Marianne, nursery teacher in a primary school)

*I did once belong to a science network it was organised by county. We'd go to the development centre. They had practical activities set out that you could try and then take back to school. It really transformed my thinking about what science could be like in the nursery.*

(Sadie, nursery teacher in a primary school)

Accredited courses were mentioned by several respondents, but Eleni's response was typical of the group.

*Yes of course it's great to get a certificate. It shows others that you have accomplished something. But what's really important is working on impact – bringing ideas back to the setting and working with the whole team to get the initiative on board.*

(Eleni, foundation stage teacher in a primary school)

A key expectation of traditional professional development opportunities is that some sort of change would occur as a direct result. It assumes a direct linear causality between development opportunities taken and the quality of teaching. But, in common with participants in Moyles' study (2001), the educators I interviewed

realised that educational improvement in their sector depended on they themselves wanting to make a difference and feeling empowered to achieve it. The recognition of the more affective concerns of their role, such as, a sense of vocation and the investment of themselves in their work, was a key factor influencing educators' perceptions of successful and effective support for professional development.

Sue's response indicates her thinking about a certain duality in the way that she characterises the nature and purpose of professional development as indicated below.

*Continuing professional development... on a practical level – I suppose it keeps you current with government initiatives, practical things, correct regulations and procedures that we just have to follow. But on another level, there's other things that are about personal fulfilment closely linked to creativity. A practitioner's own creativity can benefit children and their families. You can tap into what interests you as a person and then bring that learning back to benefit the setting. Of course, it can be linked to setting's own development plan and feeds into the ethos and growing vision.*

(Sue, early years practitioner at a children's centre)

Sue's reflections demonstrate how the complexity of her working theories might be enriched by learning she experiences outside the narrow confines of the professional development opportunities on offer (Blaise, 2009). For Sue it appears that the personal is professional. Her interests, her enthusiasms and creativity are components of her professional identity and impact on the culture of her setting. Conversely many of her peers expressed the challenges and frustrations they had experienced when accessing support for professional development.

#### *Frustrations and obstacles*

Respondents expressed the challenges they have faced during their careers in accessing professional development opportunities. For example, Lisa recalled her experiences in working at a day nursery that was part of a business chain.

*I found that in those settings you aren't treated with very much respect and it was stifling in terms of professional development and growth.*

(Lisa, nursery nurse in a nursery class in an infant and nursery school)

In her case senior leaders did not support or attempt to develop the setting as a professional learning community or attach any worth to the growth of individual's professional development.

Nina too, expressed her dissatisfaction with the lack of choice and ownership permitted in her current school.

*I can only go on courses that are specifically related to my performance management targets. It's always something to do with phonics...*

(Nina, nursery nurse in a nursery class in an infant and nursery school)

Senior leaders at Nina's setting seemed overly preoccupied with the input-output model of professional development discussed earlier in the chapter. She goes on to succinctly sums up her position in respect to national and institutional expectations:

*I'm not a professional in most people's eyes...but I have to act like a professional and I have a professional job to do. I have to make sure my 'key' children make their expected progress by the end of the year. I'm accountable. I should get support!*

(Nina, nursery nurse in a nursery class in an infant and nursery school)

Her comments allude to the tension in the use of standards as a focus for professional accountability and the ways in which this impinges on her professional autonomy and decision making (Doeke, 2006).

All those interviewed cited experiences of being 'sent on courses.' However, Nina's experience particularly, was one of being a passive object, to be shaped, trained and upskilled. Unfortunately, her reflections on her professional development conveyed little sense of the early years educator as a social actor, living the role and making her own sense from her experiences of working with young children and their families. According to Siniscalco (2005) such a rejection of her capacities might make her, and others in the same situation, less likely to go on to engage deeply professional learning opportunities.

Some of the early years educators raised concerns about the credibility of some training providers and the merit of some of the development activities on offer. This was particularly associated with one off training events.

*Day courses just depend on the individual trainer. Some just read from a script. I've become more discerning now...I don't want a wasted morning.*

(Marianne, nursery teacher in a primary school)

*Courses can be a bit hit and miss. I'm not keen on this type of training. It's ok for keeping you current with initiatives or regulations – Letters and Sounds or safeguarding training...but for anything else...there's very little impact to show.*

(Colette, teaching assistant in a reception class in a primary school)

In both these cases, the educators are emphatically rejecting 'top-down' or transmission models to professional development. They appear resentful of the time wasted on such opportunities that do not connect with their needs or provide them with new understandings. Both appear to realise that being positioned as a receiver of knowledge does not encourage their capacity to make critical judgements about the usefulness of the knowledge being imparted (Borko, 2004).

Sadie also gave the following as an example of the least effective experience of support for professional development. Her comments suggest that knowledge acquired in transmission events is limited in its application (Doecke et al., 2008).

*It was a local university-led refresher course. There wasn't much input about early years. I was just told to make it a bit simpler! When I went back into school after raising my own kids I felt like an intruder. I'd been out for so long and the refresher course really didn't prepare me for early years teaching.*

(Sadie, nursery teacher in a primary school)

Several respondents also highlighted the variability of some usually well received development opportunities, such as networks or cluster groups. For Sadie, one particular cluster group appeared to perpetuate the divide between those working in maintained and non-maintained settings.

*Networks vary. I was invited to one once and it was very cliquey – lots of pre-school people who knew each other well. Other networks can be useful but it mostly depends upon the set up and the structures that are in place. Once people know each other they tend to go off at tangents and need some structure.*

(Sadie, nursery teacher in a primary school)

*Occasionally I do go to the early years assessment moderation courses but people tend to talk about irrelevant stuff.*

(Nina, nursery nurse in a nursery class in an infant and nursery school)

Some events intended to support professional development seemed to suffer from too little structure, despite their promise of ‘bottom-up’ generation of professional knowledge and mutuality (Little, 2001).

Attending professional development events during the day was problematic for some respondents, either because of lack of funding to ensure cover for their absence or because they felt children’s learning was compromised in some way by their not being present. Yet others found evening and weekend events presented difficulties for their responsibilities and commitments outside of their work role.

Documenting and evaluating professional development opportunities were also viewed as challenging for some of those participating in the study.

*We’re supposed to feedback about any courses we’ve been on in a staff meeting. It’s interesting sometimes but not much happens as a result. We also supposed to keep a portfolio of all out training that we’ve taken. You fill in a form. I suppose it’s for proof for Ofsted.*

(Sadie, nursery teacher in a primary school)

The process described above is associated with accountability and shares little in common with Goodfellow’s (2004) view that a professional portfolio provides a tool for self-inquiry. Instead of a being a collection of hurriedly completed evaluations, a professional portfolio could be an opportunity for reflective and critical thinking that helps reveal hidden dimensions of practice and make educators knowledge tacit.

Opportunities for talk and reflection with fellow early years educators were highly rated. Some expressed disappointment with a lack of dynamic conversations (Schon, 1983) in professional development activities.

*We never got to talk to each other. I don't just want to be listening to someone at the front. I like to know how other practitioners deal with these situations.*

(Lisa, nursery nurse in a nursery class in an infant and nursery school)

Lisa recognises that she and her colleagues in the sector have capacity, and an appetite, for reflective and critical enquiry. Similarly, Sadie commented on the need for time 'to process this training and think together and on your own how it could be used in your planning.' Her opinions chime with those of Simpson (2010) who notes that such reflective opportunities should be built into professional development opportunities to help early years educators reflect on their practice, improve their practice and critique the official discourse of professionalism, as discussed in Chapter 1. Being encouraged to rely on central direction does not enable educators like them to set the direction of their own learning and development or participate in opportunities that engage their critical faculties and encourages them to develop autonomous decision (Smyth, 1991).

There was a real sense of frustration from some educators that prospective aspects of their identities are not currently addressed by opportunities for professional support. Eleni and Marianne both drew attention to their desire to be more influential in their work, something that was not nurtured by the professional development opportunities they had engaged with.

*It's the dynamics of the relationships in the team that's hard. I try to articulate and share my understandings and expectations. I'm not sure how to go about it.*

(Eleni, foundation stage teacher in a primary school)

*I try to work on impact – bringing ideas back to the setting and working with the whole team to get the initiative on board. The real challenge... the question for me is how do I get this message across to others when they are busy and I don't want this to be an add on?*

(Marianne, nursery teacher in a primary school)

*How on earth do I get my colleagues to see this sort of thing is important?*

(Lisa, nursery nurse in a nursery class in an infant and nursery school)

The respondents' comments indicate are trying to engage with a particular aspect of professionalism, namely leadership, which is frequently disregarded or perceived as an optional extra for those working in the early years education sector (Moyle, 2001; Rodd, 1998) and not adequately reflected in the government's standards for any of those working in the sector. Neither do technical approaches to professional development acknowledge the need to build educators' capacity to lead and manage change or innovation, to reflect on and experiment with practice in their settings (Guen, 2008).

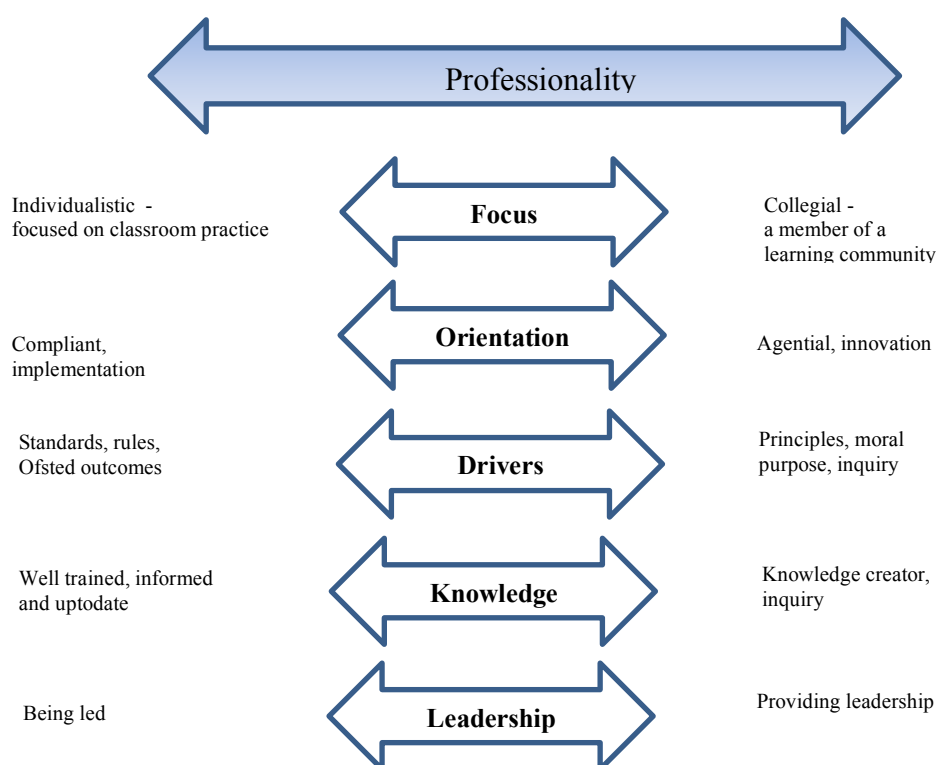
Lisa, Sadie, Marianne and Eleni are grappling with two key dimensions of professional identity, that of moral purpose and agency (Frost, 2017). Both are considered essential features of authentic learning and teaching (MacBeath and Dempster, 2006) and pertain to educators' motivation and belief in their own ability to make a difference to the educational enterprise (Schleicher, 2016). Making a difference for these particular respondents involves decision making about how they carry out their role, about the environment to support learning, about their interactions with children, their views of what counts as an appropriate curriculum for young children, the establishing and nurturing of relationships with children and their families and the nature and role of teaching and assessment in early years settings. The respondents' desires to be influential, not just as educators in their own classrooms but to have a voice in a wider sphere demonstrates an aspiration for advocacy for young children. Such self-efficacy is emerging as a key factor in educational success (Scheerens, 2010). Support for the growth of these capacities in early years educators is a necessary part of any efforts to contest the dominant discourses of professionalism explored in Chapter 1 (Miller and Cable, 2011).



## Towards an alternative form of support for professional development

In this section I begin to formulate my ideas about an alternative form of support for professional development for early years educators. In order to do so I draw upon my conceptualisations of professionalism and support for professional development. My experiences of the HertsCam Network; a charity which offers programmes based on an approach to school improvement known as ‘teacher-led development work’ provided me with a starting point and a structure that I decided to adapt for my prospective intervention.

The key to the HertsCam Network approach is an enriched approach to the concept of professionalism I first introduced in Chapter 3. The following diagram suggests that teachers have a choice to construct their professionalism either as one with the characteristics listed more on the left-hand side, a more restricted professionalism or one that corresponds more to those on the right, a more extended professionalism.



**Figure 4.2:** Dimensions of professionalism based on Frost (2013)

The programmes offered by the HertsCam Network embrace the idea of teacher leadership, but the approach adopted rests on the assumption that it is possible to enable all teachers to develop their leadership capacity in ways which suit their circumstances and professional concerns, irrespective of job title or designated role. This non-positional and inclusive approach has enabled many secondary school teachers to lead innovation, build professional knowledge, develop their leadership capacity and influence colleagues and practice in their schools, enhancing their professional identity (Frost, 2017).

The principles of non-positional leadership and support systems designed to enable teachers to engage in strategic and highly collaborative teacher-led development work resonated with the aspects of extended professionalism I wished to support early years educators to develop and enact. Stories and accounts demonstrating these acts of non-positional leadership and its transformational effect are well documented and plentiful (Frost, 2014). Although much of this work occurred in secondary schools the approach offered me real optimism and encouragement.

A similar view of leadership as relational, collaborative and interdependent is emerging from within the early years sector (Siraj and Hallet, 2014; Rodd, 2013). Leadership is conceived as an inclusive activity, the responsibility of all those working in children's centres, private, voluntary and independent settings and the early years foundation stage (Nutbrown, 2012). MacDowell Clark and Murray (2012) offer a paradigm of 'leadership within' which resonates with Hill's (2014) characterisation of 'non-positional leadership' in HertsCam. For them early years leadership is similarly 'non-hierarchical, flexible and responsive' and may 'emerge at any level of the organisation wherever the appropriate knowledge and expertise or initiative occurs and with the ability to act on challenges and opportunities' (MacDowell Clark and Murray, 2012:33). They explicate three features of leadership: *catalytic agency* defined as personal agency used to bring about change, *reflective integrity* an ongoing process in which practice is questioned and challenged in order to bring about improvement and *relational interdependence* which involves empowering and collaboration with colleagues.

Both Hill's (2014) and MacDowell Clark and Murray's (2012) conceptualisations of leadership have the development of practice at their core, furthering the learning, development and wellbeing of children and young people. Both move the focus from formal leadership with its emphasis personhood and position to the promotion of leadership as a 'dimension of being human' (Hill, 2014: 74).

In the HertsCam approach participants exercise leadership via the execution of a project plan. The process involves seven steps as outlined by Hill (2014).

<p><b>Step 1 Clarify your professional values</b> The first step is for participants to clarify their professional values. We have learned that by enabling participants to clarify their values in collaboration with colleagues their passion and moral purpose is mobilised.</p> <p><b>Step 2 Identify your concern</b> Tapping into that moral purpose enables participants to identify a concern. They explore what they are bothered about in terms of pupil learning.</p> <p><b>Step 3 Negotiate with colleagues to explore your concern</b> The third step is to then negotiate with colleagues to explore that concern. For most participants, this is the first time they have engaged in such professional dialogue.</p> <p><b>Step 4 Design and produce an action plan</b> Following these negotiations, facilitators support participants to design and produce an action plan for their development work detailing, a sequence of planned activities such as experimentation, consultation with pupils, colleagues.</p> <p><b>Step 5 Negotiate with colleagues to refine the plan</b> During and outside of the TLDW sessions, participants discuss their action plan with colleagues and invite critical feedback so they can refine the plan ensuring it is robust.</p> <p><b>Step 6 Lead a project that draws colleagues, students and families into collaborative processes</b> With a robust action plan, participants can lead their development work, reflecting on its impact and adapting it during the process.</p> <p><b>Step 7 Contribute to knowledge building in your networks and educational systems</b> During the whole process as well as afterwards, participants contribute to the building of knowledge about teaching and learning and exercising leadership in their networks and educational systems.</p>
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**Figure 4.3:** The 7-step model of teacher-led development work (Hill, 2014)

The development work process is supported by a year-long programme normally consisting six twilight school-based sessions taking place from 4.00-6.00pm. Programme tutors are generally a member of the teaching team from the school. The participants are usually drawn from the school's teaching team, although those who are not qualified teachers are also encouraged to join. Of great importance is a set of

clearly planned and organised tools, such as forms, facsimiles and practical tasks which are made available to the tutors to model and guide participants as they progress through the 7 steps. In addition to the support provided in the school-based sessions, each participant receives one-to-one tutorials with the programme tutor usually three times during the course of the academic year. Tutorials entail exploration of leadership of development work, guidance on portfolio maintenance and preparation for network events. Meetings last twenty to thirty minutes and represent valuable opportunities for teachers to receive individualised support. Approximately 100 participants are engaged in TLDW each year. They are encouraged to participate and share their stories of development at a series of Network events throughout the year. The year culminates in an Annual Conference celebrating their achievements. Teachers submit a document which contains evidence of their participation in the programme and of their development work. This is assessed by the tutor. The course is certificated, at the equivalent of 30 level 7 (masters level) credits. The programme built around these steps has been used to great effect within many secondary schools in Hertfordshire and adapted for use in schools abroad, as the International Teacher Leadership initiative (Frost, 2014).

The activities within this programme are designed to enable teachers to think and act strategically and to pursue their goals or agendas by planning and leading a project. Through this process of development teachers not only improve practice and create or enhance professional knowledge but also have a positive influence on their colleagues and the conditions in which they work (Frost, 2012). The programme has been developed and facilitated in such a way that it would mobilise educators' moral purpose, empowering them to become change agents and enabling them to believe in themselves as lifelong learners (Hill, 2014).

This approach resonated highly with my aspirations and was aligned to the needs expressed by the respondents in my exploratory study. My vision was for early years educators to develop an enhanced professionalism one where the focus is collegial and each is a member of a learning community; where the orientation is towards innovation and agential activity; where the drivers are early years educators' principles and moral purposes (Frost, 2014). What I wanted to achieve was an

expansion of notions of support for professional development in the early years sector from limited policy-driven models to one that is transformational in nature; one that takes into consideration the professional context, the challenges and complexities of this field of education and would enable prospective participants to develop their leadership capacity.

In addition, my analysis of early years educators' experiences indicates the following principles underlying the most valued forms of support for professional development.

- using external expertise linked to school-based activity
- scope for educators to identify their own professional learning focus
- support for reflection and planning and experimentation
- emphasising peer support and collaboration
- processes to encourage, extend and structure professional dialogue
- processes for sustaining the professional learning over time to enable teachers to embed the practices in their own settings
- recognition of individual educators' starting points and enthusiasms
- recognition of particular workplace contexts and diversity within the sector
- is of longer duration
- internal support from senior leadership
- belonging to a setting-based group
- membership of a wider network of like-minded individuals.

This has much in common with those elements of support for professional development deemed essential by Hill (2004) and Cordingley et al. (2005). My exploratory study helped me realise that the mobilisation of early years educators' enormous potential requires specific support, with regard to a planned intervention and dedicated structures, activities and tools to inspire them and enable them to develop this prospective aspect of their professional identities. Any programme of support I created would need to involve the social interaction, engagement in conversation, debate, creative tension, questions and divergent perspectives among

individuals to provoke the development of opinions, a greater depth of understanding, new perspectives and professional growth (Potter, 2001).

I reasoned that I might adapt the TLDW programme and use it as a basis for the creation of my own intervention. It would be an entirely appropriate method for nurturing early years educators' professional identities, no matter what their role, and it would support them to make a difference to children and families, their colleagues and beyond their own setting. Perhaps this approach would satisfy the needs of respondents like Sadie who says:

*In an ideal world I would like more head space...a mentor to talk to...time to plan, make changes, reflect, think with colleagues and with specialist advice when I need it. Then there would be excitement. CPD wouldn't be an onerous task!*

(Sadie, nursery teacher in a primary school)

## **Conclusion**

The conceptual work in this chapter is important as it helped me develop a rationale for my future research and the particular intervention I was to plan and carry out with the intention of supporting early years educators develop and enact their professionalism. The analysis of respondents' experiences helped me to frame an alternative approach to support for professional development based on what I now term 'principles of procedure' (Stenhouse, 1975). Rather than being indicative of intended learning outcomes for the participants or a particular pedagogical stance, they outline what I intended to provide in terms of a supportive yet challenging context: a context which uses particular strategies and conditions to specifically nurture the growth of a more extended professionalism for those participants involved. These principles of procedure were then be used throughout the process to evaluate my strategy for support for professional development and determine its validity.

I maintained that developing a structure through a programme of support which values prospective participants' passions and experiences and fosters the conditions

for them to make connections with like-minded others, would enable them to enact an extended professionalism focussed on making a difference to the children and families with whom they work. In order to achieve my study aims, I utilised a correspondingly action-oriented research methodology which I clarify in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5**

### **My role as a researching practitioner**

In this chapter I discuss the perspective underpinning my methodological choices. I first consider the dimensions of my role as a ‘researching practitioner,’ discussing my identity in relation to my proposed research and explaining the stake I hold in it. I explain what I understand by the concept of ‘reflexivity’ and why this is pertinent for my aims for the study. I problematise my role as an ‘insider-researcher’ and its implications for the research process by considering my approach to three challenging key aspects my work: proximity, ethics and power.

#### **My perspective as a researching practitioner**

I am enrolled upon a doctoral programme intended to support education professionals with extending their understanding and improving practice in their schools and educational systems through researching and theorising policy and practice. Embarking on the doctoral research process gave rise to a new dimension of my professional identity, that of a ‘researching practitioner’ (Burnard, Dragovic, Flutter and Alderton (2016), a professional educator researching my own area of practice; an ‘insider researcher’ who collaborated with colleagues to address a professional concern.

My perspective stems from my own professional background and professional identity as explained in the Introduction. Accordingly, the focus of my research emanates from concerns both as a classroom teacher and a provider of professional development opportunities for early years educators and was intricately bound to my personal experiences and professional perspective of what it is to be an educator of young children.

In the Introduction I explained that I hold aims and values which I realised would affect the research (Cutcliffe and McKenna, 2002). A core value for me is my



commitment to making a positive difference to the lives of young children in our school system through my work with early years educators. I was explicit about my intentions for my research to provide me and the study's participants with 'new ways of thinking, new possibilities for action and sometimes a new sense of direction' in our daily work (Schratz and Walker, 1995:3).

My moral perspective determined my focus on supporting early years educators, whose role involves a model of technical practice, is tightly regulated and subject to judgements in terms of performativity (Osgood, 2012) and was pursued through the professional development opportunities I created and led for early years educators. My leadership of this action agenda intended to 'change the lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals work and the researcher's life' (Creswell, 2003:9).

Learning was the overarching aim of my study, not just my own learning in my role as a researching practitioner but also the professional and practical learning of those educators who participated, enabling them 'to justify, explain and make sense of themselves in relation to other people, and to the contexts in which they operate' (MacLure 1993: 312) as I supported them, both individually and as a group, to construct and reconstruct the purposes and priorities in their work.

My consideration of the researching practitioner role indicates its complexity. Drake and Heath (2011) advise that those, like me, who are researching and developing their own practice ought to consciously develop:

... a fluid and flexible stance...behaving sometimes as a professional, sometimes as a researcher and at all times as an author who is making meaning... and presenting this to an external audience.

(Drake and Heath, 2011:2)

I recognised the many complementary skills involved in teaching and researching, however I was initially unconvinced of the need to switch roles consciously. I could not envisage a behaviour or strategy I routinely use as a teacher that would not be useful or similar to those used as a researcher. However, I appreciated the need to

find ways to scrutinise my actions and be explicit about my motives (Schratz and Walker, 1995), finding ways to interrogate my research practices and the representations that I would go on to make (Pillow, 2003:175). The development of a consciously critical or reflexive position was an important dimension of my research.

### **Developing reflexivity in the researching practitioner role**

Reflexivity is integral to the whole research process (Gerrish and Lacey, 2006; Kingdon, 2005). I was aware that I needed to reflect continuously on how my own actions, values and perceptions were impacting upon the research setting and affecting data collection and analysis. Morrow (2006) suggests reflexivity can aid understanding of the phenomenon under exploration and help with accurately portraying the meaning made by participants, thus aiding my attempts to understand and support early years educators' enactment of their professionalism and my efforts to give voice to experiences and perceptions within the community. According to Pillow (2003) exercising reflexivity should not be comfortable but a human quality, and a skill that can be improved (Holland, 1999). Despite being testing at times, I understood that being reflexive would require me to be both intellectually sharp and emotionally open (Savin-Bladen and Howell Major, 2010).

In the following section I consider the implications of my researching practitioner position for my envisaged study in a reflexive manner. I was mindful though of Spivak's (1988) caution that merely rendering positions transparent does not make them unproblematic. Somekh (2006:24) claims that, 'no research is ever neutral, but action research because it embodies an imperative for change is always explicitly value laden.' In the following section I examine these values in more detail, considering the strengths and weaknesses of my insider role and my approach to potential challenges in terms of proximity, ethics and power.

## **Considering the insider role**

The study I carried out involved conducting research within a community or identity group of which I consider myself a member. I use the word ‘community’ in a wide sense. For me the early years education community comprises all colleagues who advocate for the highest quality education and care for young children. This characterises my study as ‘insider research’ and cast me in an ‘insider researcher’ role (Kanuha, 2000), someone who possesses ‘intimate knowledge of a particular community and its members’ (Hellawell, 2006: 15) based on my many years’ experience as a teacher, school leader and CPD provider.

I engaged with research that complements my professional life and particularly my current role as an independent consultant. At the start of the research process much of my work involved providing professional development activities such as workshops and courses and supporting small clusters or network groups of practitioners. I was not employed by any one institution; however, I worked closely with schools and individuals, some of whom I have built up relationships with over the past decade. During my research I provided a programme of professional development for a group of early years educators. Some of these educators were known to me, either as one-time colleagues or through working relationships I have with their institutions. Others participants, and the settings in which they work, were unknown to me. The venue was a nursery school in Hertfordshire that is well known as an innovative provider of care and education for young children.

Throughout my research process I was accountable to this community in terms of the quality and effectiveness of the opportunities I provide: to the HertsCam Network which validated my programme, to the programme participants and also to those school governing bodies or setting owners who funded their participation. It is from within this context that I consider reflexively my role and position in the research process.

It appeared to me that there were three key advantages of being an insider to the research domain:

- I have a thorough understanding of the group's culture (Drake, 2010).
- I have the ability to interact naturally with the group and its members (Coghlan, 2007).
- I had, in some cases, a previously established, and therefore greater, relational intimacy with some members of the group (Moore, 2007).

Additionally, I conceptualised myself and so aligned myself as a co-learner with the participants (Bonner and Tolhurst, 2002) as I sought to create and facilitate a programme of support that would enhance the development of their professionalism.

Of particular interest to me, and key to my understanding of what motivated me as a practitioner undertaking research, is that my study had the capacity to have an immediate impact for those participating. I did not have to wait until my research was complete before disseminating my findings in the hope that head teachers or those with power or status took note. It was my intention that from the moment I met participants at the 'taster' event I planned for June 2015 they would begin to engage with each other, sharing their concerns and reasons for expressing an interest in the programme. These and other benefits to the insider position are summarised on the left-hand side of Figure 1 below.

<p><b><i>Strengths</i></b></p> <p>Knowledge of teaching and learning field/EYFS culture</p> <p>Collegial relation</p> <p>Ease of recruitment of participants</p> <p>Supportive network</p> <p>Availability of resources/cost effective</p> <p>Autonomy</p> <p>Moral purpose</p> <p>Transformative intentions</p>	<p><b><i>Weaknesses</i></b></p> <p>Loss of broader perspective</p> <p>Taken for granted assumptions about field/culture</p>
<p><b><i>Opportunities</i></b></p> <p>Immediacy/potential for immediate impact</p> <p>Access to people and institutions</p> <p>Access to information</p> <p>Manageability</p> <p>Loyalties and values</p>	<p><b><i>Challenges</i></b></p> <p>Identity as a researching practitioner</p> <p>Position of myself as active participant</p> <p>Position and role of participants</p> <p>Work-research balance</p>

**Figure 5.1:** SWOT analysis of the insider researcher position

However, a number of these advantages are related to a disadvantage, which I have summarised on the right-hand side of Figure 1. Some report that insiders often struggle to balance their insider role and the role of researcher as they attempt to research their communities and those in it (Gerrish, 1997; Hanson, 2013 and Kanuha, 2000). From this SWOT analysis I predicted I might face challenges and uncertainties in my insider position in terms of critical distance, power and ethics (Breen, 2007). In the following section, I examine these three areas in more detail. I posited that considering these potential conflicts reflexively before engaging in research would assist me in handling future dilemmas that might arise in terms of my role and position in the research process.

### ***Critical distance***

As an experienced teacher, I approached my proposed study from a position of knowledge and understanding about teaching and learning in the early years of education. Hurst (2008) argues that such a shared biography would facilitate trust and disclosure with participants. This was something I was keen to establish. The development of the group as a learning community would involve building sufficient trust and interpersonal ease to allow for robust discussion in which each member of the group is able to offer challenge and critique. This facility depends on the rapid growth of familiarity and mutual acceptance (Frost, 2014). My role was key in enabling this. I was not the type of ‘native’ researcher Kanuha (2000) envisaged but planned to take an active role in purposely scaffolding the development of a learning community in which enhanced social capital allows critical friendship to flourish. The flawed ‘outsider within’ approach described by Herr and Anderson (2005) was not for me. Downplaying my own status would have been deceptive. Instead I sought to transform individual, organisational and even social transformation through my research (Anderson and Jones, 2000). I was mindful that such a relationship may result in an intensity of research that I realised might not be replicated (Galea, 2009) and might call into question my ability to be sufficiently distant and therefore uncritical in terms of my research. Srivastava (2006: 219) notes that ‘too much insider status may be just as problematic to easing exchange as too much outsider status.’

My initial concerns were that top down policies and procedures were having an adverse effect on early years educators' sense of agency and control in their work. Foss (1996) heeds caution in these types of studies and draws attention to the risk of what she calls 'symbolic convergence', the shared narrative of group with common experience. This narrative is often centred on a commonly felt wound. For Foss the process which is anchored in a single identity script leads to participants taking a 'victimised' stance. This was pertinent to my intended research. I need to be cautious that the group's possible sense of injustice about their positioning did not overshadow my transformative intentions for the programme and the positive impact it could have upon participants' professionalism.

Although proximity is advantageous in that it may make easier for me to gain access to participants and achieve a deep level of trust (Hanson, 2013) it might also lead to assertions of bias and other problems encountered in collecting data (Breen, 2007) especially via interviews, for two reasons. First, the insider-researcher might encounter difficulty in focussing on the interview process (Kanuha, 2000). The shared background and understandings might suggest that an aide-memoire rather than a full schedule be a useful tool during interview. I have used these before to good effect, in common with Hodgkinson (2005), who notes such an approach generates a more relaxed atmosphere and encourages a better conversational flow. The danger however is in the complacency that might arise when the interview becomes more like an everyday conversation. Similarly, Pitman (2002:285) argues that an insider's familiarity can provide an 'illusion of sameness' with potentially disastrous results.

I needed then to approach interviewing process carefully, ensuring that I neither refrain from probing too deeply, nor bias responses by offering my own opinions or views, nor take what might appear to be shared understandings for granted. Mannay (2010) advises taking measures to 'make the familiar strange.' In this vein, Hockey (1993) offers the following practical advice: adopt a formulaic approach to interview and consciously enter a role-play when adopting the role of interviewer. Unfortunately, Hanson (2013) discovered that adopting this persona created an artificial officiousness to the interview situation and a far from relaxed atmosphere.

Although I usually employ a more conversational style during participants' tutorials for example, I needed to ensure I questioned taken-for-granted experiences, assumptions and seemingly shared vocabulary to avoid surface level analyses and biased interpretations (Hodkinson, 2005) if I were to use these conversations as research data.

Secondly, some insider researchers discovered the process of interviewing can be complicated by participants' assumption that the researcher already knows the answers. Although Platt (1981) advocates asking naïve questions to prompt fuller answers, DeLyser (2001) reports that probing for information that the informants know she already knew sometimes appeared to annoy them. The nature of the programme that I propose will perhaps counter this as talking or being interviewed by me is only one way that I will gather data about my research aims. Throughout the process participants will be required to keep a portfolio documenting their development work and the ways in which their professionalism develops; planned opportunities to talk and contribute to activities in pairs or triads with other participants will encourage them to share information and opinions; opportunities to use drawings, collage and other visual representations will be used during programme sessions; the educators are also required to present posters and lead short sessions about their work during Network events to practitioners from other sectors of the schooling system who genuinely have different experiences of being an educator and to produce a publishable summary of their completed development work for the Network database.

To summarise, by adopting a reflexive stance I did not limit the questions I asked, nor the responses I might expect to hear but I responded to each situation and interaction mindfully. This mindfulness was extended to the ways in which I considered and responded to the ethical dimension to my study.

### ***Ethics***

With respect to the ethical nature of my proposed research I needed to ask: as a researching practitioner to whom am I accountable and for what? Appleby (2013) advises caution in terms of two potentially conflicting ethical stances, that of the

university and that of the workplace. Ethical principles of privacy, confidentiality, informed consent and non-malevolence rightly informed my work and as a doctoral student I am expected to conduct my research in accordance with the guidelines of British Educational Research Association and seek ethical approval from the University. However, in common with Gerrish (1997) I have found there is often a lack of understanding within these guidelines as to how these principles play out in community, action-based insider research such as my own. There is a distinction here as highlighted by Macfarlane, (2010:22) between *procedural ethics* which is about satisfying obligations laid down by the University and *ethics in practice* ‘where the real challenges lie in making decisions in the field.’

I anticipated that within my research dilemmas of *ethics in practice* might arise in situations that involve multiple loyalties and conflicting demands, therefore responsibility of care takes on a different perspective because of my professional position (Hanson, 2014). As a researching practitioner my future job security and professional reputation depended on my continuing personal and professional relationships with colleagues and with those who participate in the programme of support. I needed to balance the need to develop a critical stance whilst maintaining professional allegiances.

During the course of my research I did not plan to collaborate with colleagues I worked with on an everyday basis to participate in my research, however I drew upon my network for collaborators at different stages of the process. I did not need to seek permission from any immediate employing superiors nor was I funded by an organisation or body of employers, however I was accountable to HertsCam Network, the programme participants and those whom fund their participation, to provide useful and effective support for professional development.

Some of the participants were from settings where I have worked previously in an advisory capacity or were members of staff at schools where I have longstanding professional and/or social relationships with the head teachers who are supportive of my research aims. As I planned my intervention I was aware that potential tensions might arise in my study because of my relations with the participants and the



potential exploitation of these close personal and professional relationships. I needed to consider whether there may be participants who may feel obliged to apply for a place on my programme and if so whether this means I am exploiting them for my own ends (Simmons, 2007). For some participants, their knowledge of my close relationship to their head teachers might have prevented them from disclosing barriers to extending their professionalism, whilst others might disclose sensitive information that might put my role in jeopardy. I then would have a dilemma of what to do with the information. Depending on its nature (if not a safeguarding issue which would need reporting in keeping with national and school policy) I would have to question how or whether the information is processed and presented in a way which does not damage my own employment and trustworthy reputation, nor place participants in a vulnerable position.

The nature of confidentiality and the assurance of anonymity also needed to be considered carefully. The types of publications or outputs and the arenas these will be available in will vary throughout the research process. Participants would be sharing posters, seminars, publishable accounts and their portfolios within the group, within their schools and within the Network. I envisaged that in addition to my final thesis I would be keeping a blog, using a twitter account, producing reports for stakeholders such as the settings head teachers and governors, presenting work at the Network meetings, academic conferences and professional and academic journal publications. I needed to be mindful of the ways in which I reported or narrated the developing story of my study and the final thesis. Could anonymity for participants be truly maintained when working with a small number of people? Could I write an honest but critical report if I hope to continue to work with those involved? For those schools in difficult circumstances I needed to assure them of confidentiality and negate the consequences of possibly being identified with 'negative' findings. These questions troubled me as I planned the intervention. Negotiating and renegotiating with participants about what and how to share our work and being aware of power relations, professional practice and institutional cultures was key (Appleby, 2013:17).

Uncertainty and unpredictability appeared to be the markers of ethics within insider research. O'Neill (1989) urges practitioner researchers to have courage to confront mistakes as they make compromises between competing values in the face of imperfect information. Macfarlane (2010:24) elaborates upon a virtue approach to ethics, one which 'provides a way of thinking about how to live research ethics rather than treating this complex element of our practice as about abiding by a set of static principles.' Figure 2 next outlines some of MacFarlane's thinking.

<p><b>Living the virtues</b> (some examples)</p> <p><i>Courage</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeking to challenge one's own presuppositions or conventional wisdom.</li> <li>• Developing a project that might not necessarily attract funding or represent a 'fashionable' topic.</li> <li>• Pursuing a line of research without undue regard to career and other financial imperatives.</li> <li>• Freely admitting when research does not go to plan or when you feel your previous research was factually or conceptually mistaken.</li> </ul> <p><i>Respectfulness</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being respectful to others including vulnerable individuals and communities.</li> <li>• Being aware of the temptation to take advantage of organizational, social or intellectual power over others.</li> <li>• Taking care not to cede too much power to others who may wish to distort the research process for their own ends.</li> </ul> <p><i>Resoluteness</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being transparent about circumstances when the extent of data collection or creative endeavour has been compromised from original intentions.</li> <li>• Being aware of the temptation to start analysing data or other results before a representative sample or case study has been completed.</li> </ul> <p><i>Sincerity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring that the results of research are based on an accurate representation of all the relevant information collected.</li> <li>• Resisting overt or covert pressure from a powerful sponsor or stakeholder to skew results to meet their needs or expectations.</li> <li>• Being aware of the temptation to conceal or exaggerate results in order to gain some advantage, either materially and/or to reputation.</li> </ul> <p><i>Humility</i></p> <p>Fully acknowledging one's intellectual debt to others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring all research partners are fairly represented in being accorded publication credit corresponding with their relative contribution.</li> <li>• Inviting others to challenge your own thinking and/or results.</li> </ul> <p><i>Reflexivity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being self-critical about one's own research findings or personal performance as a researcher.</li> </ul>
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**Figure 5.2:** Living the Virtues (Macfarlane, 2010:25)

Macfarlane's approach appealed to me. It seems to emphasise a 'personalised, relational and responsive approach to the ethics of insider research' (Duncan and

Watson, 2010:53) and offers a way in which the tacit knowledge I possess in my professional role can be made explicit in my researcher role (Sternberg and Harvath, 1999). It connects with my professional values and my compulsion for authenticity in my work. In my work I have always aimed to act with acceptance, care, understanding and trust as advocated by Drummond, Rouse and Pugh (1992). I have no reason to think that my aims in my work as a practitioner researcher should be any different.

### ***Power***

It is frequently assumed that there is an asymmetry of power in research with researchers being more powerful than the researched, setting the agenda, determining the parameters of the research, asking the questions and analysing what is said (Kvale, 1996). Similarly, in educational professional development opportunities, a power imbalance might be perceived between the provider as an expert, and the participant as a recipient of knowledge and understanding (Dhanda, 2008). I consider the extent to which these characterisations of power related to my research.

I approached my work with a keen sense of my responsibility to those involved in the research process. Taylor (1991) discusses responsibility in a way that I recognise, where responsibility and agency go hand in hand. As a researching practitioner I was agentic in that I was able to define my own concerns, set my own goals, carry out and evaluate my own actions but this deliberate action is rooted in a responsibility to the common good. For Taylor, it is the relationships I have with individuals in the communities which would enable my responsible actions. I therefore needed to consider critically these relationships.

As a provider of professional development opportunities, I have always thought of myself as a facilitator; helping participants extend their learning. Since as an educator I value individuals taking responsibility and decisions about their own learning, then my actions as a facilitator need to reflect these beliefs. Participants can be as self-critical and ethical as I am. Such a view does not necessarily even out perceived or actual power imbalances but as Dhanda (2008) argues is an

acknowledgement of participants as educators with identities shaped by context, by moral formation and by resources for self-reinvention.

As an insider researcher I did not aim to recruit educators for the sole purpose of securing them as subjects in a research project. Participants would be 'signing up' for a professional development opportunity. They, or their organisations, would be paying me for a service and would expect value for money. I am providing an opportunity for them to develop as educators but I am researching my own practice and the impact it has for those participating in terms of their professionalism. Although I might presume that participants are willingly engaging in the programme and thus in my research I needed to be mindful that this is a not normally a dimension of support for professional development and consent needs to be negotiated and renegotiated throughout the process.

I also presumed that the majority of participants have not been involved with an opportunity for professional development of the nature that I proposed. My research interest and position as a doctoral student was made clear to potential participants and emphasised throughout the course of the programme. The message I gave is that by participating we as a group would be constructing a better understanding of what effective professional development for educators is and have it may be supported.

My perspective was that I am conducting research 'with' rather than 'on' the group of participants (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) and by choosing to conceptualise or present myself as co-investigators or advocates I attempted to minimize the power differential between myself and the research participants further (Breen, 2007; DeLyser, 2001), regarding the research participants as active 'informants' to the research (Crotty, 1998). I believed co-construction to be an important and achievable dimension of my study, although Pillow (2013:182) reminds me that 'embedded within the research process are relationships of power that all researchers must face.' However, I do not consider I am necessarily operating from the position of 'power and privilege' that Winpenny (2010:96) recognises. In the context of my research I am somewhat vulnerable. Being honest with participants about my aims, I was dependent upon participants committing to action themselves and allowing me

to scaffold them as they reflected upon their practice and its impact. My thoughts are in keeping with the findings of Munro et al. (2004) and Thapar-Bjorkert & Henry (2004) who note that respondents also exercise power which affects the experience and outcomes of the research.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of chapter was to explore reflexively some of the constraints and dilemmas involved in insider research. I have deliberated on some of the positive aspects of being an insider researcher whilst questioning the extent to which these ways raise issues concerning proximity, ethics and power relations. I appreciate the need for reflexivity throughout the research process, and my instinct is that I ought to embrace my subjectivity, rather than attempt to apologise for it or seek to minimise it in order to achieve my aims.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Methodological choices and study design**

The aim of my research was to create and lead a programme of support for early years educators which would enable them to develop and enact a more extended professionalism. I recognised the potential of the process for changing the lives of the participants, the institutions in which they work, and the children and families with whom they work. I also viewed it as a professional learning opportunity for myself, in my new role as a researching practitioner. I intended my leadership of this action to inform and generate insights, knowledge and understanding about both the issue of professionalism and the process of support.

This chapter provides the rationale for selecting an action-based methodology, one that supported me to plan a research project, and design an intervention, that enabled me to meet my practical and moral aims. There are seven sections. The first rehearses the aims and key features of the project that my chosen methodology would need to accommodate. In the light of this, I justify an action-based approach to my research, highlighting its emergent and developmental nature and how action-research methodologies influenced my planning. I next outline the project design, a strategic, time-bound, sequence of related activities and events. I explain the intervention itself, the programme 'Making a difference in the early years.' Next, I describe how the programme lent itself to generating the types of data most likely to:

- capture the research process and
- evidence its transformative effect upon the participants enactment of professionalism

I explain how I planned to analyse the broad range of evidence collated and outline my plans for analysing the data gathered. Finally, I consider the notion of 'ownership' of the data and the ways in which knowledge generated might be shared more widely. The following chapters provide a critical narrative of the process, including reflections on the extent to which I realised my methodological intentions.

## **Aims and key features of my research project**

In this section I revisit the aims and key features of my project. I required a methodology which would be a good fit with these and support me in realising my aims for my work. For me, engaging in research was an opportunity for generating and finding new possibilities for action in my work. The starting point was a professional concern that I felt compelled to address. I intended to bring about tangible change both with regards to individual educator's enactment of professionalism in their workplaces, and also in my own learning. I sought to do this by creating, exploring and evaluating the ways in which I might enable and support early years educators to think and act differently in their work with young children. The support would be provided by a year-long programme, 'Making a difference in the early years' which I would facilitate for a group of early years educators. My exploratory study, and consideration of professional identity and the conditions for professional learning, led me to assume, with some confidence, that this action would lead to change in an immediate and direct way.

My aim was to improve practice and generate knowledge through an innovative change process that had potential to 'change the lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals work and the researcher's life' (Creswell, 2003:9). Underpinning this action, therefore, was a political agenda (Robert-Holmes, 2005). For me the research process was an opportunity for promoting social justice, rather than purely seeking understandings of or truths about a social phenomenon (Carr and Kemmis, 2003; Gomez, Puigvert and Flecha, 2011). Therefore, my approach to the research was necessarily action-based and developmental in nature.

Additionally, it was also my intention that leadership of this action would inform and generate insights, knowledge and understanding about both the issue of professionalism, and the process of supporting its growth (Cohen, Manion, Morrison and Bell, 2013). I share Schratz and Walker's (1995) view that knowledge building and practice are symbiotic.

In summary, a number of features had to be accommodated by the methodology I chose for my research project, including:

- The starting point for my study was a professional concern rather than a specific question.
- My intention for early years educators to develop and enact extended professionalism.
- The need to create knowledge about the enactment of professionalism in the early years sector.
- My intention to develop, provide and improve support for this type of professional development.
- The need to create knowledge about developing and facilitating such support systems.
- My ‘insider’ role in the research process and the need to both account for this and to embrace it.

### **Developing an action-based methodological approach**

In the following sections I account for the development of an action-based methodological approach. I consider the nature of my research (i.e. its possibility, scope, and general basis, the nature of knowledge that would be generated,); the key processes involved (i.e. the notion of cyclical, iterative and reflective approaches to inquiry) and its key practices (i.e. the description of methods and rationale for the choice of methods, the data produced and how this is analysed).

The group of research methodologies known as ‘action research’ immediately appealed to me as a useful tradition to draw upon. Action research has a complex history. It is not a single academic discipline. It has emerged and developed over a long period of time in numerous, different contexts (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Sandretto, 2007). These approaches include, practitioner research, participatory action research, collaborative inquiry, emancipatory research, action science, classroom action research, action learning, and critical action research (Noffke, 1997). These have been employed in diverse fields such as, education, healthcare,



anthropology, the promotion of social justice and civil rights, and in a wide variety of public, private and community-based organisations.

Despite these disparities, each of these is considered as ‘research leading to social action’ (Day et al., 2006: 451). I therefore comment on the resonance and degree of usefulness of action research for my own study, but also draw attention to any possible shortcomings.

### **The nature of my research**

Action research approaches are defined by a focus on improving practice (Eliot, 2006). This allows researching practitioners to reflect upon the outcomes of their own questions, beliefs, assumptions, and work activities to develop, understand, and improve their own practice while simultaneously influencing the organisation or institution within which he or she works. Key to my study was my plan to do just that. My vision was for the educators, with whom I worked, to develop an enhanced professionalism; one where the focus is collegial and each is a member of a learning community; where the orientation is towards innovation and agential activity; where the drivers are early years educators’ principles and moral purposes (Frost, 2014). However, knowledge creation about this process of improvement was equally valuable to the outcomes of my study. I was particularly keen to understand how I might generate and build knowledge that was authentic, valid and vital.

I was interested in how individual early years educators characterise their professional role. I wanted to help them explore how their identities have been formed and are continually modified. I planned for them to use these reflections as a basis for action in their work with young children. This is in complete contrast to the role and positioning of early years educators espoused by the current neoliberal discourse (see Chapter 1). I wanted to generate fresh critical insights into the professionalisation agenda in the early childhood education sector, particularly in terms of the notion of worthwhile professional opportunities that run counter to the dominant model. I was concerned with enabling early years educators to draw upon

and enhance their human agency, instead of disempowering them with a top-down accountability strategy.

### ***A programme of support***

I recognised that the mobilisation of early years educators' enormous potential required specific support, in terms of planned intervention and dedicated structures, activities and tools to inspire them and enable them to develop this prospective aspect of their professional identities. I aimed to develop and offer a transformative professional development opportunity, intended to have an immediate and lasting impact on educators, the young children they teach, their schools and the wider community. My preliminary exploration of early years educators' professional identity and their experience of professional development opportunities was a starting point for my empirical work. The programme I planned was based on the findings from my exploratory study. In this, participants indicated three expressed needs for professional development opportunities in which they would experience being valued, having connections and making a difference.

### ***My role and position in the process***

I wanted to use the research process as a way of developing myself as an advocate for those working in this educational sector. I considered that this might be achieved by articulating and amplifying educators' voices throughout the research process (Apple, 2006). My hope was that my research might engage people's interest and enthusiasm and lead to 'new ways of thinking, new possibilities for action and perhaps a new sense of direction (Schratz and Walker, 1995:3).

I also wanted to engage in professional development for myself, examining my perceptions and actions in my own work context, as I try to provide opportunities for early years educators to consider their own practice. I am mindful of Schön's words with regard to this.

If educators hope to contribute to the development of reflective practitioners, they must become adept at such reflection on their own teaching practice

(Schön, 2001: 17).

I was to be central actor in the research process. In the previous chapter, I rehearsed the role that reflexivity would play in the research project. As such, a further consideration was that the methodological approach selected would acknowledge that knowledge production would be taking place in a context that was neither value-free nor neutral in its endeavours or predictable in any way. It would be messy work. It would, I envisaged involve planned opportunities for professional dialogue and collaboration gradual insight, but also would encompass complex relationships, possible conflict and differences of opinion (Maguire, 2005).

The relationship between knowledge generation and action is valued and recognised by certain action researchers. Freire (1972) emphasised praxis or theory/practice integration. Lewin (1946) talked about a circle of planning, action and fact-finding about the result of the action. Such a cycle or spiral is common to many action research approaches. Some describe this cycle as ‘plan, act and observe, reflect (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988:11), others more simply, ‘look, think, act (Stringer, 2008:8). According to Raelin and Coughlan (2006) this merging is intentional. Dick et al., (2008) helpfully explain how within the spiral thought guides action, which in turn guides thought.

Thought draws understanding or insight from the experience of acting.  
Action then puts the understanding to the test.

(Dick et al., 2008:6)

Knowledge building, integration or development is therefore apparently built into the process. Despite this, I could not take it for granted that knowledge building would happen automatically. I acknowledge that I have approached my research with an informal theory about how professionalism might be enhanced, informed by my professional observations, reading of the literature and previous experiences. I chose actions that I thought would result in the outcomes I wanted to see. However, the literature provides little guidance about how to develop knowledge built on these perhaps taken-for granted theories within a participative, action-based approach process. Winter’s (1993:316) reminder that action research is ‘above all an elaborate model of learning’ was helpful. In pointing towards Piaget’s (1972) theories of the assimilation of new experiences into existing cognitive schema and Kolb’s (1984)

explanation of experiential learning cycles, I was reminded of the early years' education practice of documentation (Magaluzzi, 1996).

Pedagogical documentation is a continuous and cyclical process, whereby the everyday activities, successes, challenges, possibilities, and thoughts of children and adults are rendered visible. These are then open to debate and reflection (Carr and Lee 2012; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence 2007; Picchio, Di Giandomenico and Musatti 2014; Rinaldi, 1998). Such documentation may include a range of artefacts, such as, photographs, video recordings, handwritten notes, transcribed conversations, drawings, reports. Dialogue and reflection is included, and also documented in the process, with the intention of developing pedagogy within early years settings.

The use of documentation is perhaps distorted in many English early years settings due to the continued emphasis on recording 'child observations' linked to prescribed, normative developmental expectations, and the prevalence of adult-centred and outcomes-oriented assessment processes. However, I considered that using a similar, considered approach to documenting educators' own enactment of professionalism would be one way of ensuring that dialogue and reflection on action and therefore, knowledge creation and sharing would be a focus of the whole process. On an immediate level, this would be with respect to the individual educators involved and their communities, but I considered it might contribute in some way to the promotion of larger-scale, democratic social change. The idea of a 'portfolio' was an aspect of the research and the programme, developed with the participants, and reported on in the following narrative chapters.

The discussion above demonstrates my position within the research process. My plans had much in common with 'practical action' research. According to Carr and Kemmis, this can be said to be taking place when:

outside facilitators form cooperative relationships with practitioners, helping them to articulate their own concerns, plan strategic action for change, monitor the problems and effects of changes, and reflect on the value and consequences of the changes actually achieved.

(Carr and Kemmis, 1986:203)

Although these were indeed my aims, I did not think of myself as an ‘outside’ facilitator. What particularly provoked my thinking here was the word ‘cooperative.’ It appeared to me that using this word to describe the relationships in my own research might be problematic. For me, this term is perhaps indicative of an unequal power relationship. It might imply that I would be an expert, imparting advice, and not involved directly in the process of learning afforded by the research project. This is not what I envisaged for my study. I was placed in the middle of the action as a key protagonist, not on the outside, as an observer and/or experimenter. However, what I could not account for at the planning stage of the process was the participants’ expectations of me as a facilitator and their expectations of the programme ‘Making a difference in the early years.’ What was perhaps slightly unusual was that participants would ‘sign-up’ for a professional development opportunity and discover that the entire process was the focus of a doctoral study. It was vital that I was explicit about this with participants when they expressed an interest in the programme. The ways in which I managed this transparency are detailed in the following narrative chapter.

Crucially, I was not planning on researching ‘on’ educators, but ‘with’ them in order to support the development of their professionalism and produce improvements in practice. I did not characterise early years educators who participated in the process as being passive recipients of an externally conceived professional development opportunity. I recognised them as people whose professional identities are non-static, changeable, dynamic and multi-faceted and that changes in their professional identities are linked to the concept of human agency. I wanted educators to be brave and confident at fostering practices that are responsive to their contexts and children’s needs.

In the same way, I wanted to recognise and respond to the learning needs of educators participating in the programme. My experience concurs with that of Dadds’ (1997:32) who remarks that teachers do not enter into professional development opportunities as ‘empty vessels.’ In order to help these individuals enact aspects of their professionalism and produce tangible changes in their daily work, I avoided the delivery model of professional development with its

connotations of educators being uncritical implementers of outside policies. Rudduck's words inspired me as I planned a programme to enhance early years educators' sense of agency in their practice. She urges teacher educators to:

find structures and resources to help teachers re-examine their purposes...and feel more in control of their professional purposes and direction. Some sense of ownership of the agenda for professional action, is in my view, a good basis for professional development and professional learning.

(Rudduck, 1988: 210)

I recognised my decision to make my research a mutual, collaborative endeavour may seem puzzling to participants initially. Part of this process would be addressing what might appear to be a paradox in the way that I think of and portray professionalism. I share Frost's (2017) understanding of the role and power that forms of collectivity such as, collegiality, collaboration, networking and community building, play in the construction of individual's professional identity and enhancement of professionalism. Individuals may indeed 'articulate their own concerns, plan strategic action for change, monitor the problems and effects of changes' (Carr and Kemmis, 1986:203). However, the context for this is their settings, the teams of colleagues they work with, the children and families in the setting's community and wider networks. This resonates particularly with the work of early years educators who do not normally work in classrooms in isolation from their colleagues.

### **The key processes – a viable design**

In order to meet my aims to lead a collaborative and reflective venture, I created a viable design for my research project. The overriding characteristic of the process associated with action-based research is iterative, cyclic, and reflective. McTaggart and Kemmis (1988) describe this as: problem identification; planning; action; monitoring; reflection/evaluation and renewed action. In situ reflection and continual analysis is then key to capturing the facilitation of both the development of the intervention and the ways in which educators enact their professionalism.

My design of the process was also influenced by the way in which development work is conceptualised in the HertsCam Network.

Strategic, focused and deliberate action intended to bring about improvements in professional practice. It takes the form of collaborative processes featuring activities such as consultation, negotiation, reflection, self-evaluation and deliberation which take place in planned sequence.

(Ball, Lightfoot and Hill, 2017: 75)

Here the opportunities for purposeful dialogue, ongoing reflection and further careful action are planned for strategically within a given timeframe. In common with action-based approaches to improvement and knowledge generation, my research incorporated a necessary spiral of self-reflection. This plan enabled me to put my ideas into practice, to act and observe the process.

When designing the project, I found the work of Kotter (1996) useful in helping me envisage and plot these various phases or steps of the timebound project (Appendix 6.1). However, my previous experience told me that the process may not be as clear cut as an action-research spiral or indeed my own staged design suggested. I was aware that it is less important to dutifully follow these steps than to capture and reflect upon the growing sense of development in mine and the participants' practice, to reflect upon our growing understandings of what it is to be an early years educator in a challenging political and social wider environment, and how we can influence those contexts in which we live out our identities.

Each of the phases is explained in greater detail in the critical narrative of the following chapter. As explained in Chapter 4 my plans were influenced by my involvement with the HertsCam Network; a charity which offers programmes based on an approach to school improvement known as 'teacher-led development work.' I planned a programme that would be effective in terms of valuing educators, helping them to forge and make the most of connections with others and supporting them as they make a difference to the lives of children and their families; transforming both themselves and their contexts. I aimed for it to be 'intensely practical, to bring about a more just society in which individual and collective freedoms are practised, and to

eradicate the exercise and effects of illegitimate power' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007:27).

I now turn to the ways in which I intended on evidencing these prospective aspects of my research.

### **The practices of my research**

This refers to the methods for data collection and rationale for their choice. It also refers to the process of analysing the data. Particular methods used should accord with the nature of the initial dilemma, the nature of the practice situation and with the researcher's personal and professional belief system. Rowell et al. (2015) add that the focus of any approach to data collection and analysis is to create an 'actionable' knowledge; that is, knowledge that is sound and relevant to all participants.

I found Altrichter and Herr's advice that the data gathering process needs to be researcher friendly or realistically do-able, given the personal and professional demands and commitments outside of the doctoral journey, helpful, as was a further recommendation that data might be gleaned or generated via daily routines, tasks or other activities carried out in the course of one's professional life. This particularly influenced my decisions about 'what counts as data.'

### **Deciding what will count as data**

The purpose of my doctoral study is to conduct an action-based enquiry that seeks to address early years educators' frustration and anxiety about a perceived loss of professional agency and downward pressure to ensure young children are 'ready' for school. Earlier in Chapter 4 I reason that particular forms of support might effectively aid early years educators to develop more robust professional identities. In order to evidence and document the enactment of professionalism and the support process to enable its development I was concerned with collecting a wide variety of



evidence in a way that helps me glean information about and understand the early years educators' *professional identities* in terms of their developing professionalism; their *projects* in which they collaborate with colleagues and their impact on the development of their practice, and the learning and knowledge being built via the *programme* and the ways in which it enabled them to do this.

The literature in this area is unclear as to the extent that opportunities such as the programme I have planned, influence professional identity (Beijaard, Verloop, and Vermunt, 2000). Therefore, I need ways of documenting this evidence so I could analyse it, reflect on it, share it with others involved or affected by what I do and interrogate it in the more public sphere of the HertsCam Network and further afield. Importantly, this evidence was not to be analysed after the programme is completed as a summative exercise. Rather, in keeping with an action-research approach, the evidence was to be reviewed at particular points in the year but it was also used flexibly from session to session to feed into planning and supervision appropriate for the participants' needs.

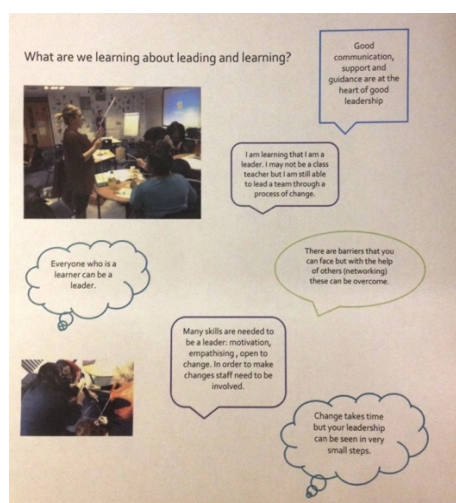
I made pragmatic choices about the types of evidence I documented and used to inform my understanding. My approach entailed documenting evidence garnered from more traditional collection sources, but also necessitated capturing less structured and ephemeral evidence from programme activities and the tools used for professional development as a way to triangulate and enrich my emerging understanding (Jarvis and Graham, 2015; Kemmis, Taggart and Nixon, 2014). More conventional methods designed included keeping a research journal. Those from the programme itself included programme activities, annotated photographs, conversations, records of participants' presentations, stories and posters, supervisions and portfolios.

The effectiveness of these tools and techniques in helping me demonstrate the validity or 'worthwhileness' (Dadds, 1995:174) of my research and particularly the impact of the programme rests on the authenticity and variety of the evidence they yield. I constructed for myself a table (see Appendix 6.2) to clarify the types and sources of information, how these might be documented, the type of evidence that

might be yielded and how this relates to the broader themes and aims of my research. I exemplify one type of evidence below.

### ***Artefacts generated from session activities***

Many of the activities in which educators were to participate are discursive in nature for example items in Appendix 6.2. The sessions involved dialogue in pairs or trios usually followed by group discussion. It was essential to capture the comments of participants and there are many creative ways of doing this. The photograph below shows an item from a programme ‘bulletin’ showing a representation of an activity where each participant reflected on their learning about leadership and learning. Participants were encouraged to use this collective thinking as evidence for their portfolios. Items such as this can serve several purposes. They foster an element of mutuality to provide participants with a sense that as a group they have a common cause. They encourage participants to empathise with each other as they reflect upon and articulate their ideas and benefit from reciprocal challenge (Frost, 2014). They give a help to build up an holistic view of programme activities and also generate the ‘thick description’ I require to evaluate the programme (Geertz, 1994).



(Excerpt from bulletin)

### ***Participant tutorials***

Over the course of the programme the educators were to have access to one-to-one or paired tutorial opportunities with me to support them as they ‘experiment with changing practice,’ ‘gather and use evidence,’ and ‘collaborate to manage change’

(Frost and Durrant, 2003). Through face-to-face discussion and opportunities to tell the story of their projects early years educators would deepen their understanding of the ways in which their capacity for professional knowledge and agency is growing, a rich source of information which I approached conceptually rather than procedurally. I was wary of the potential power asymmetry which might be perceived in such interactions, however. Supervisees may deliberately voice what they think the supervisor wants to hear (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The power difference might be somewhat reduced by inviting a third person to be present to conduct the supervisions or having a joint supervision with one participant taking the supervisor role and disrupting the taken for granted role relationships, nevertheless the issue of the power inherent in human conversations and relations remains (Foucault, 1983).

However, these were not to be formal audio taped interviews but a chance for participants to tell their story and clarify any issues they wish to discuss outside of the main sessions. This approach is more akin to empathetic ‘interviewing’ as promoted by Fontana and Frey (2005). I intended to make notes about key themes: participant professional identity; their project and the programme, summarising the discussion during the session for the participant to add to or amend as a record of the supervision and as an aide for their further action (Kvale, 1996).

### **Analysing and reflecting upon the evidence**

I followed the University’s regulations about working with and protecting the data I collated. Original documents were protected by photocopying or photographing and stored on computer files which were encrypted and regularly backed up. The information was also dated and numbered to produce a navigable reference system. Any audio recordings were selectively transcribed for the purpose of ‘quotes’ to illustrate particular points. I intended to handle the evidence manually rather than use a computer software package, to protect the authenticity of the evidence in terms of its appearance and context but also because my previous experience of using such software effectively distanced me from the evidence.

The analysis of evidence documented would take place through the entirety of the process. I sought to understand and derive meaning about the participants' professional identities, the projects they led, the ways in which they enacted their professionalism, and the way in which the programme supported them at each step or stage of the research process.

My system for coding would be both deductive and inductive (Denscombe, 2014). My intention was to become thoroughly familiar with the data and immersed in its details. I realised that I could not avoid a deductive approach considering my experiences as a practitioner, the themes from the exploratory study that have both focussed my concern, and my reading of the literature influencing the study. Thematic coding in terms of loose categories concerning the enactment of professionalism, the development work undertaken and aspects of the programme itself, would be applied to the evidence and then developed as categories emerge. I was aware though that I needed to be reflexive in my approach to data gathering and analysis: open to other evolving topics and issues particularly those that ran contrary to my expectations or assumptions about the transformative nature of my study.

I was keenly aware that my research would take place in a particular social context, with particular participants, at a particular time in their and my professional lives. Additionally, I was so closely involved in the garnering and analysis of the evidence that for another researcher to collate a similar set would be impossible. For some this signals that my study is subject to decisions and bias that potentially undermine the trustworthiness of the findings. The quality of quantitative research has been traditionally judged in terms of its reliability and validity and generalisability. Despite these three standards taking on the status of the 'scientific holy trinity' (Kvale, 1996: 22) amongst the positivist research community, they are regarded as less significant for qualitative research (Mason, 2002), non-representative of the actual validating practices of qualitative researchers (Norris, 1997) and 'no longer adequate to the task' (Lather, 1993: 683).

However, I felt there was still a need to ensure verification of my work as a piece of worthwhile research, by adopting a more pragmatic approach to quality assurance.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) reconceptualised the evaluation of qualitative research in terms of its credibility, transferability and dependability. I give a brief outline of what these three terms might entail for me as I led my research, challenging my own assumptions and recognising how my decisions shape the research study (Carcary, 2009) whilst still seeking to carry out its transformative aims and ascribe to those principles of procedure outlined in Chapter 4.

### ***Credibility***

I wanted to demonstrate that the evidence was reasonably likely to be appropriate and accurate (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The evidence needed to be recognisable as the type of data that is likely to arise from professional development activities and in particular those activities and opportunities that I planned for the programme. Accuracy was improved by involving the participants in checking items of evidence for factual correctness or to ensure their views and experiences were accurately conveyed for example in the supervisions. I sought to ensure that evidence was ‘crystallised’ through a number of varied sources (Richardson, 1994), over a length of time and acknowledged participants’ multiple perspectives. As I began the process I felt confident that my research would be credible and produced in a democratic manner.

### ***Transferability***

My research would not be generalisable, occurring in a specific community and in a specific timeframe, but the findings ought to be transferable to a certain extent in the educational community. Bassey (1981:85) defines this as ‘relateability’ - another professional development facilitator would be able to relate it to her own practice and find in it some considerations for development. Similarly, early years educators would be enabled to share their work with colleagues, engage them and help them relate it to their own practice. Additionally, the extent to which the programme acts as a catalyst for participants to feel valued, to be connected to others and to make a difference to young children and their families was of the utmost importance.

### ***Dependability***

I recognise that I am inextricably bound to the research process and that another researcher, although possibly arriving at comparable conclusions, would be unable to replicate my research. The challenge would be producing a convincing explanation, and account of my data analysis, based on my interpretations. Miles and Huberman (1994) pinpoint this difficulty for a qualitative researcher who:

faced with a bank of qualitative data [and] has very few guidelines for protection against self-delusion, let alone the presentation of unreliable or invalid conclusions to scientific or policy making audiences. How can we be sure that an “earthy”, “undeniable”, “serendipitous” finding is not, in fact wrong?

(Miles and Huberman, 1994: 271)

Although it was easy to identify a multitude of potential sources of bias and prejudice within qualitative, insider research as my own, I suspect it is equally difficult to create hard and fast rules for judging the validity of particular studies or domains of inquiry, nor is it possible to dictate procedures which if adhered to will systematically eradicate bias and error (Norris, 1997). Mason’s (2002) guidelines provoked my thinking about the ways in which I ought to:

- conduct the research systematically and rigorously
- be strategic, flexible and aware of the research context
- be accountable for its quality and claims
- engage in critical scrutiny or active reflexivity
- produce convincing arguments.

This is what I wanted to achieve throughout the research process. I return to these points in the following narrative chapters.

### **‘Going public’ with the research findings**

I was interested to read of the obligation for action researchers to ‘go public’ with their research findings, having these scrutinised by other professionals, including those whose belief systems vary markedly from the researcher (Rowell et al., 2015).

Sharing then forms part of the development of intended social change. This brings to mind the notion of ‘ownership’ of the action and the knowledge that would be produced throughout the research process. I envisaged that knowledge would be produced jointly within the participant group.

The scaffolding provided for early years educators through the programme enabled them to contribute to knowledge building, not only through their development work and changes to practice in their settings, but also in the programme group school-based sessions, their wider network and potentially the wider education system. By conceiving knowledge building and sharing in this manner, I hope to disrupt the widely held belief that educational change results from research in which ‘findings’ are shared. This means that professional knowledge building is reinstated in the locus of practice: the teacher and the school (Elliot, 2006; Somekh, 1995) and importantly it is enriched through ‘mode two’ learning that is socially generated, practical, trans-disciplinary and subject to multiple accountabilities (Nowotny, Scott and Gibbons, 2003).

Knowledge was built in two ways through my research process: through developing practice but also through sharing stories about these changes. Early years educators developed their practice; explicitly documenting their growing understanding but also embedding this knowledge into their teaching practice and routines. However, this knowledge about ways to do things better was shared within the group sessions and network events through a dialogic process as members present their reflections and work to each other and provide each other with critical friendship. Opportunities were taken through belonging to the HertsCam network for participants to present their stories of development in workshops, to put up posters and receive feedback from others and to write written accounts for the network’s websites.

By including these strategies and opportunities my research focuses attention to the spiral of self-reflection in the learning process through the development of ‘self-critical and self-reflective community’ (Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 205) I aim to embed learning in a social process that reinforces participatory practices by means of dialogue, collaboration and networking knowledge building (Kemmis, 2010;

Somekh, 2006). As such, the programme was intended as an opportunity for participants to question the status of their taken for granted professional practice and is then an emancipatory tool.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I clarified the rationale for an action-based methodology, one that would support me in planning a research project, and design an intervention, that would enable me to meet my practical and moral aims. On reflection, I employed a number of methodological principles which I consider underpinned my decisions about developing a strategic approach to designing, conducting and analysing my study. These include: reflexivity of my researcher's position, assumptions and practice, transparency of decisions made and upholding good ethical practice throughout the research. In the next chapter I present a narrative analysis of the research process, the programme and the evidence gathered throughout the intervention.



## **Chapter 7**

### **Introduction to the narrative**

In the previous chapters I account for my decisions to employ an action-based approach to my research. I reasoned that this was appropriate, as the research process was focussed on an intervention I planned to instigate and lead. The appeal of this approach was that it would lead to direct and immediate change but also enable me to create new knowledge. My assumption was that through this action, I would create knowledge about early educators' enactment of their professionalism and the ways in which this might be enabled through a year-long programme of support. Hammond (2013) makes the point that only by taking such action do we discover what is possible, useful or desirable.

It is only by undertaking the journey that our ends, and the actions needed to achieve those ends, become clear.

(Hammond, 2013:609)

The implication is that my story of the journey is key to such knowledge. Accordingly, in this chapter of my thesis I use a critical narrative approach to reporting my research.

The chapter consists four sub-chapters which relate to the experiences, activities and events that occurred over a 16-month period during the enactment of the intervention. Chapter 7A 'Creating the conditions for the programme' acts as a prologue, presenting the preparatory activities I carried out in order to establish a favourable setting for the programme 'Making a difference in the early years'. Chapter 7B examines the start of programme and is titled 'Engaging with the programme.' It relates how I facilitated an environment of trust, in which participants were enabled to clarify their values and identified their concerns, design and produce an action plan and consult with colleagues to refine it. Chapter 7C 'Leading development work' explains how participants' enacted their professionalism by putting their plans into action and beginning to lead their projects in their settings. The focus of Chapter 7D, 'Contributing to knowledge building through the process

of leadership', identifies the contributions that participants made to knowledge about teaching and learning through the leadership of their projects.

Reports of this nature are commonly employed in the action research tradition and often serve two purposes (Dennett, 2001; McMahon, 2001). First, they are an opportunity for researchers to engage in reflexivity, examining his or her own role, behaviour and relationships in a particular social situation as part of the investigation (Somekh, 1995). Second, a narrative report might also be viewed as a form of analysis, not one that seeks to create explicit generalisations, but one in which issues, problems and challenges might be made visible and scrutinised (Winter, 2002). I explain both of these next.

### **Reflexivity and critical narrative**

The following four chapters are written in the first person. They follow the chronology of events over the course of the intervention, recounting those phases of the research process design indicated in the preceding chapter. The narrative is not a complete record of events. It is though, an attempt to tell a complex story in its entirety by means of configuring disparate elements of the research process drawing on 'sources of significance' and the wide range of evidence generated and collated throughout.

My professional values are a key source of significance. As explained earlier in the thesis, I chose to intervene and to act on what was a professional concern. This is not the same as having a research question or filling a gap in the research literature. The purpose of my study was supporting those educators, people whom I consider colleagues, with the development of a sense of ownership in their work with young children, despite the national context of 'professionalisation' and 'schoolification' as discussed in Chapter 1. I wanted to be involved with contributing to solutions, not merely highlighting problems. My values, and sense of moral purpose were key to determining what I considered to be of significance for the narrative chapters.

My professional concern and values, in turn, determined the focus of the conceptual chapters in the early part of the thesis. In these early chapters I began to theorise the relationships between professional identity, professionalism and the role that professional development opportunities may play in supporting early years educators in their work with young children. Again, these developing theories influenced my decisions about what is significant for inclusion in the critical narrative.

Since the narrative is shaped and driven by my values and growing understanding of key concepts, then the reflexivity I discussed in Chapter 5 is vital. I was not only involved in the research process but was heavily invested in the enterprise, as its instigator and director. Consequently, I make no claims for objectivity. Those who are dismissive of critical narrative as an introspective pursuit may have cause for critique (Colne, 2000). However, I am careful to acknowledge my potential bias. My assumptions are usefully surfaced and purposefully examined in this activity. Writing the narrative was for me a key tool for accounting for and commenting on my decisions, thinking, insight and responses to the unfolding research. As a consequence, my sense making of both the process of my supporting educators and the development of an enhanced professionalism is revealed in the narrative through deliberate introspection.

Using a critical narrative also enables me to meet a further aim of my study. As an advocate for the early years education sector and those who work with young children, I was keen to ensure the voices of those involved in the intervention were represented. The data collection methods yielded vast quantities of evidence about their experiences of the programme and the ways in which they enacted their professionalism in their settings. Conveying their experiences in an authentic manner might pose difficulties for me. I was aware of my privileged position as an observer, an analyst, a critic (Susman and Evered, 1978) but remained open to any views that might contradict my own experiences or values or assumptions. So, a narrative approach afforded me the opportunity to account for multiple voices and differing experiences of the early years educators involved (Finlay, 2002). This was important, as explained at the beginning of this thesis, the participants had wide

ranging roles, years of service, qualifications and experiences and differing workplace contexts.

### **Narrative as a layer of analysis**

Writing the critical narrative itself constituted a 'mode of enquiry' (Connelly and Clandin, 1995). It presents a particular account of the action as it happened in the flow of the research process. Writing the narrative helped me make sense of the abundant amounts of data collated, the reflections and analysis that occurred, and the decisions and modifications I made throughout the process.

The narrative is critical as I sought to examine the issues that arose and attach significance to certain events. As mentioned previously, not every event and activity is narrated. An episodic approach is used with a continuous interrogating of the literature to understand and examine significant events. The methodology I employed supported my growing understanding of the problem I had set out to address helped sharpen my perspective about what was significant throughout the research process and guided the data production and analysis.

## **Chapter 7A**

### **Creating the conditions**

Educators can develop an enhanced professionalism when they are supported (Frost and Durrant, 2003). I reasoned that the success of my proposed programme, ‘Making a difference in the early years’ similarly rested upon my creating favourable conditions for its growth (Ramahi and Eltemamy, 2014). This would involve my carrying out a number of strategic actions:

- building a group of enablers
- securing an agreement with the Hertscam Network
- promoting the programme
- developing the programme

In this first narrative chapter I discuss each of these in turn. The chapter illustrates a process of consultation with a wide range of colleagues. Drawing on evidence from my research journal I note the significance of these key events and the decisions made to help me create the conditions for my intervention.

#### **Building a group of enablers**

Securing the interest and support of others was key to the success of my proposed research. This initial task involves creating a ‘guiding team’ around my concern (Kotter, 1996). I planned to do this by opening up a ‘communicative space’ (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon, 2014) with a number of colleagues and others. I sought to find both ‘collaborators,’ with whom I could confer about my strategy and evaluate its validity and also ‘enablers’ who might help me action the proposed strategy. To some extent this occurred informally. However, I consulted two groups; one a group comprised headteachers of settings where potential participants worked, and the other a broader group of individuals who might offer me feedback on my plans and perhaps be motivated to act as critical friends throughout the entire

process. I planned opportunities to meet with these individuals to solicit their feedback and comments about my concern and the proposed intervention.

I was mindful of the need to share the concern that lies at the heart of the research. I rehearsed this during the meetings, recalling Jean Rudduck's appeal for initiatives which would empower teachers.

If we are interested in substantial curriculum change, we may need to find structures and resources to help teachers to re-examine their purposes .... and feel more in control of their professional purposes and direction. Some sense of ownership of the agenda for personal action is, in my view, a good basis for professional development and professional learning.

(Rudduck, 1988: 210)

Almost thirty years later, my work with those who educate the youngest children in our education system reflected the same need. My exploratory study undertaken in 2014 demonstrated that educators had an appetite for professional development opportunities that would value them, help them make connections with others and enable them to make a difference to the lives of the young children with whom they worked.

I was determined to create an alternative to the traditional 'top-down' professional development described in Chapter 4. I wanted to disrupt the neoliberalist agenda which was positioning early years educators as technicians and young children as empty vessels. I envisaged developing a support strategy which took 'the teacher's purpose, the teacher as a person and the real-world context in which teachers work' (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992: 27) as its impetus. I wanted to develop a programme of support with the following characteristics:

- a collegial focus
- an agential orientation
- moral purpose as its driver
- educators as knowledge creators
- an inclusive notion of leadership

### ***Meeting headteachers***

I approached several headteachers to ascertain their views. They were three individuals with whom I had longstanding professional relationships. Each of them was a graduate of the HertsCam MEd and were familiar with the principles underpinning the Network's approach to supporting teachers as agents of change. Accordingly, we shared a perspective and had strong social bonds. Tania, is a primary school headteacher. In 2005, she employed me to work as the Early Years department leader in the small, rural village primary school where she had recently taken on the role of headship. I had encouraged her to pursue masters study and later join the MEd teaching team. In my role as an independent consultant, I had provided support for Tania's early years team in her new post as headteacher of a much larger primary school in an urban area of the county. Alison, was another ex-colleague. We had worked together at Tania's village primary school and I had supervised Alison whilst she undertook her own MEd. Alison had participated in my exploratory study and had just taken on the role of headteacher of a primary school in a market town in the county that year. Karis is the headteacher of a large combined nursery school and Children's Centre. We had first met whilst pursuing our MEd studies when we were both nursery teachers and deputy heads in primary schools.

These colleagues represented a valuable resource of professional experience and knowledge (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2013). By approaching them I was heeding Kotter's (1996) advice to maximise working relationships with those who have expertise to share, credibility to influence others, leadership skills to effect change and positional power to ensure the development goes ahead. We had established working relationships, shared values and understanding of a range of educational matters. Having provided consultancy services for them previously, I felt my colleagues appreciated my passion for early years education and motivations for initiating the programme. I felt they trusted me to create a worthwhile programme of support; one that might enable members of their own teams to flourish. I was aware of their ability to influence others and their extended professional networks. These aspects were crucial for sharing information, creating interest about the programme and recruiting participants. Karis was working toward an application for 'teaching

school' status, which involved her setting providing professional development and support for the wider community. She was keen to host the programme at her nursery.

Seeking the views of school leaders at this point was important to assess the viability of such a programme, both financially and in principle. I wanted to ascertain whether they thought senior leaders would be willing to release funds to pay for early years educators to participate. Of key importance was determining that other senior leaders would be supportive of participants who would be encouraged to questioning practice and surface underlying assumptions about the nature of teaching and leading. However, my initial aim at this meeting was to foster interest in the programme. I wanted to gauge the headteachers' willingness to support participants in using and developing their professional identities by leading a project that would develop their practice and professional learning. Their comments would help confirm or modify my plans and the effectiveness of the strategies I was considering.

I outlined my exploratory study and the three needs expressed by those who participated. Kris, Tania and Alison recognised my concerns and added their own thoughts. Tania's reflections echoed Burnard and White's (2008) observation that teachers lose incentive to innovate if they are overly concerned with meeting targets. Her early years team had recently been struggling to reconcile their beliefs about what constituted an appropriate curriculum for young children with the statutory narrow reporting system at the end of the key stage.

### ***Adapting the TLDW approach***

I explained to the headteachers how I might draw on my involvement with the HertsCam Network to help me achieve my research aims. Although the headteachers were graduates of the HertsCam MEd, the concepts shaping and underpinning the teacher-led development model (TLDW) had been shaped and refined in the following years. We talked about the aims and purposes of the HertsCam Network's teacher-led development work (TLDW) programme, referring to recent publications (Frost, 2013; Wearing, 2011; Hill, 2008; Mylles, 2006).



I explained how the programme had been developed and facilitated in such a way that it would mobilise educators' moral purpose, empowering them to become change agents and enabling them to believe in themselves as lifelong learners (Hill, 2011). The approach supports participants leading change within their schools and institutions; improving practice in tangible ways but also creating professional knowledge within the wider Network (Frost, 2013). This resonated with the aspects of extended professionalism I wished to enable early years educators to develop and enact.

Qualitative evidence pointed to teachers' improved collaboration and self-efficacy in participating schools. I drew attention to the following key features highlighted in a recent evaluation study (Wearing, 2011).

1. The process facilitates and encourages enquiry as a leadership strategy.
2. Group sessions support active learning.
3. Scholarly values and skills inform discussion and development.
4. Group sessions support interaction, reflection and sharing of experiences.
5. Teachers are enabled to think critically about values, practice and innovation.
6. The process develops teachers' voice and self-efficacy.
7. Teachers' project work is characterised as the leadership of development work.
8. Teacher learning is supported through friendly relationships within the community.
9. The networking supports knowledge building.
10. Participation enables collaboration in and between schools.
11. Knowledge building is enhanced through a partnership with a university.
12. Teachers build professional knowledge through collaborative, critical discussion and exchange of ideas.
13. The network supports interactive professional learning for all.
14. Well-designed tools scaffold, exemplify and illustrate teacher leadership.
15. Headteachers support teachers' development work and ensure maximum impact in school.

(Wearing, 2011)

My colleagues agreed the importance of early years educators having supportive structures that would help them to gain confidence, collaborate, network and be agential in their work with young children and their families.

*Alice was adamant about the need for the programme. She asked, 'Why shouldn't these things be available to early years practitioners and those in primary schools?'*

(Research journal, April 2015)

Nevertheless, there were adjustments that needed to be made to the programme to ensure a suitable approach for early years educators was developed. Rahami (2017) identifies six main components that facilitate teacher leadership: time, facilities, activities, outside support, recognition and reward and planning. These had considerable overlap with the adjustments and challenges we identified:

- establishing a multi-settings group
- adapting the process for the early years sector
- senior leaders' support for participants
- the assessment process

I consider each of these.

### ***Establishing a group of participants from multiple settings***

School-based TLDW groups normally consist a minimum of five colleagues from across faculties and departments. Each group is facilitated by a teacher from that school. A new set of participants are recruited each year. The programme tended to consist 6 two-hour sessions over the course of the year. Some groups met after school hours, others during the school day. This approach immediately posed a number of challenges for the early years context.

Primary, nursery schools and preschools have fewer members of staff. My colleagues agreed that budget constraints would prevent them from funding places for more than two members of their own schools. Our solution was to envisage establishing a programme that would attract participants from multiple settings. We

envisaged that the group would comprise individuals with varied qualifications, experience, roles and conditions of employment. Bringing together a diverse group might be challenging initially. Quickly establishing a trusting environment would prove to be essential. Community building might not happen at same rate as it might with groups comprised of participants who work together. However, I thought this may be mitigated by the sense of cohesion in the group being all from same sector. Having shared interests and goals might act as a leverage point (Costa and Kellick 2000) which could bring about sustainable and impactful developments in participants' own settings (Fleet and Patterson, 2009). The group might evolve into a critical mass of participants, contributing to its own learning and generating an atmosphere of trust, risk-taking and inquiry. Such a 'group culture' (Walker et al., 2010) would extend communities of learning beyond the confines of individuals, schools, systems and even countries (Ramahi and Eltemamy, 2014).

I asked my colleagues to consider the way in which the current TLDW groups operated in order to help me make some practical decisions about where, how frequently and what times the programme should take place. Those involved with educating children and young people often report they are over-worked with little time during their contracted hours to complete the tasks required of them (Grenville-Cleave and Boniwell, 2012). Freeing them from their daily teaching commitments to engage in the TLDW programme would be ideal, however the headteachers were resistant to this. Releasing colleagues during the day was problematic as this would require financial resources for 'supply' cover, a particular concern for early years settings which must abide by regulations concerning adult: child ratios. My colleagues advised that the meetings should take place in the 'twilight' period after a school day from 4.30pm until 6.30pm. This would ensure that no additional expense would be incurred as a result of settings having to provide cover during school hours for participants' absence. The start times of the session took account of some participants travelling some distance from their place of work to the venue. These sessions, although at the end of a working day, would be 'protected time' nevertheless.

I was keen to ensure that support would be available for participants between sessions. I would provide individual tutorials for participants at two points in the academic year, but further foster the group bonds by establishing a group Facebook page; encourage participants to share contact details and support visit to each other's settings. In addition, participants would have access to the full range of wider networking activities. Teachers value these opportunities for work-related learning opportunities (Berry, Norton and Byrd, 2007) which increase their knowledge base and enhance professionalism (Earl and Katz, 2013). In the HertsCam Network these events are organised to facilitate the development of critical friendships, where members present their work to each other and engage in dialogue which questions assumptions, clarifies values and interrogates practice (Swaffield, 2007)

An appropriate venue was a further concern. An accessible venue was required, with enough space to accommodate the group. Using a school site would mean that costs would be kept to a minimum, but would facilitate workplace relatedness (Euston, 2008). All three headteachers offered their schools as venues. Time and space though is not enough to mobilise participants' tremendous potential (Bolat, 2013).

### *Adapting the process for the early years sector*

When I first envisaged the programme and its membership, I was aware that previous attempts at multi-setting groups had been unsuccessful. Colleagues indicated that the programme had been shoehorned into an already established network of schools with its own norms of working. This complicated expectations of membership and attendance at the TLDW group. Although senior leaders supported the broad aims of TLDW, they insisted on joining in the facilitation of the group. This presented various difficulties including the foregrounding of specific priorities of one particular school and introducing an air of competitiveness to the mixed group. It also changed the nature of the collaborative process to a 'top-down' exercise, directed by those in powerful positions. Inexperienced facilitators found this a difficult environment to negotiate.

I was certain that some of these obstacles might be addressed and diminished. My preparatory work with local headteachers enabled me to understand their needs and

the ways in which the programme might serve school priorities. Importantly I was able to tailor the practicalities of the programme calendar and the timings of sessions to busy school schedules. I maximised the opportunities for participation before the programme was put into operation. I was clear about the aims of the programme, membership of the group, participation and assessment procedures. These were communicated in a variety of formats. Even so I was aware of the variables that might affect each prospective participant's experience, particularly, the degree of support they might have from senior leaders and particularly their own beginning point i.e. their professional identity and the degree of agency they were able or felt able to exert in their role.

### ***Senior leaders support for participants***

Our discussion hinged on the TLDW approach as a means of developing capacity for whole school improvement. For many of the schools involved the approach is part of a long-term strategy for building school culture. Some groups had been sustained over several years; in one school 58 members of staff completed TLDW projects over an eight-year period (Hill, 2014). These organisations had developed a more democratic approach to the development of teaching and learning. Teachers were enabled to decide on the focus for development activities, within the framework of the school's overall priorities and values. Innovations were found to be more likely to 'stick' and become embedded in the school's routine ways of doing things (Mylles, 2017). Teachers were leaders of this process rather than implementers of other's schemes and innovations. At the heart of the process of knowledge creation was a culture of dialogue and collaboration purposely cultivated by the school's senior leaders.

We recognised that it would be crucial that participants had support from senior leaders at their settings as the TLDW approach is quite different to other forms of professional development (Flores, 2013). Senior leaders would need to recognise that the programme realises its aims by helping educators tap into their moral purpose and enabling them to pursue what they are passionate about.

The principles underlying the programme might provide challenging as they contest more traditional views of leadership which locate this as the sphere of a small number of people with titles and positions of authority (Southworth, 2002). Mylles (2017) suggests three requirements: trust, humility and advocacy. First, senior leaders need to trust prospective participants to choose an appropriate focus for practice development. Second, they need to be able to relinquish the traditional construct of leadership associated with status, power and position and create a culture in which non-positional leadership might flourish, third they need to use their capacity to influence in order to leverage teachers' efforts.

Our discussion focused on a strategy for enabling senior leaders to engage with the programme in this way. We recognised that Mylles' conclusions and the supportive actions she discussed had been honed over a long period of time. We could not expect senior leaders new to the programme to operate at this level immediately. Their schools might not have such well-developed democratic approaches to development and improvement. However, it was important for them to encounter these ideas and consider how they might best support participants.

Several opportunities to share ideas were identified, including headteacher forums and conferences. My colleagues were keen to promote the programme at these and I provided them with materials and resources for these. We decided to invite senior leaders to an information event with any prospective participants and to encourage them to attend Network events throughout the course of the year to acquaint themselves further with the programme.

### ***The assessment process***

Participants in the TLDW programme submit a portfolio of their work for assessment at the end of the academic year. This is a selection of evidence presented for the purpose of documenting participation in the programme and leadership of development work. As the programme draws to an end, the participants assemble evidence from their collection, arrange it and label it in order to be easily intelligible to someone who does not necessarily have direct knowledge of the action or its context. The portfolio also includes additional commentary and reflective writing

that serves to make the action explicit and to make evident relevant learning that may have arisen. This is usually presented as a soft bound A4 document, containing two sections, one for recording participation and the other containing evidence of the project.

Portfolios are assessed in relation to the following criteria. Those meeting the criteria listed next are awarded of the HertsCam Certificate in Teacher Leadership, which is the equivalent of 30 masters level credits.

**Participation**

Extent of participation  
Quality of engagement

**Development work**

Effectiveness of project management  
Use of evidence for development

**Impact**

The extent of impact in the current academic year  
The extent of potential impact in the future

**Analysis and reflection**

Issues considered  
Application of literature  
Knowledge and understanding

**Presentation**

Effectiveness of structure / organisation  
Accuracy / clarity of language  
Adherence to academic protocols

(excerpt from TLDW Tutor Handbook, September 2014)

We discussed how appropriate this might be for the prospective participants and whether it was necessary to have an assessed component at all. Accredited programmes in the early years sector are usually initial training courses or those which recognise that an individual has received some specific training to enhance subject knowledge or health and safety/first aid or perhaps the delivery of specific intervention for children. All educators must complete safeguarding training. The headteachers felt that recognising and rewarding educators' efforts in this way may

support their engagement with leading their projects; it may also lead to a greater commitment to learning and leadership (Mylles, 2017).

I shared with my colleagues my thoughts about documenting educators' participation in the programme and evidence of the process of leading a project in their settings. I explained my ideas about strengthening the portfolios and the role they would have to play in demonstrating and supporting professionalism. I wanted to ensure that the creation of the portfolio did not occur post-mortem, as it were. I felt there was a possibility that participants might see the portfolio merely as a way of proving their participation in the programme. I was keen to align the process of maintaining a portfolio with the approach to documenting children's learning advocated by Carr (2001) and the learning stories approach in New Zealand, and Rinaldi (2006) as practised in the pre-schools of Reggio Emilia.

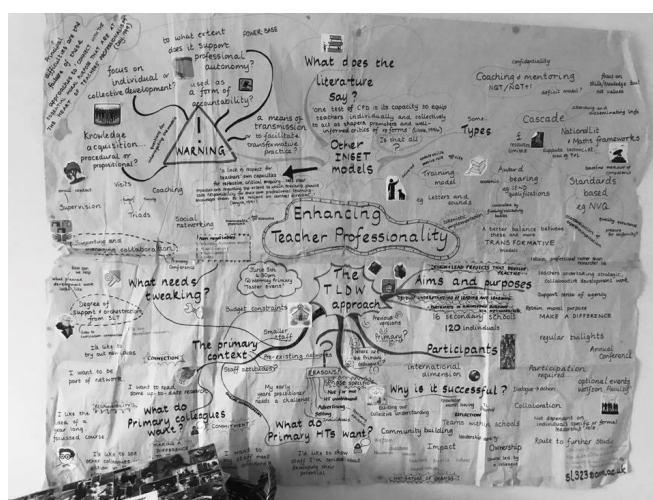
Both these approaches focus on how children learn, with documentation a way of making this visible. I maintain that this is equally important for adult learners. I felt that an ongoing process documentation might demonstrate more authentically participants' enhanced professionalism. The portfolios would an attempt to render this process visible and to make visible how the construction of doing, thinking, and knowing takes place, as well as what sort of influences or modifications can occur in these processes (Rinaldi, 2006), with potential for sharing of the documentation in the group, nurturing future action and learning. I envisaged the portfolios would take on a different format, perhaps something like the learning journals practitioners would be familiar with. These often took the form of scrap books.

My meeting with the headteachers was overwhelmingly positive. Shortly after it, Karis told me of her application teaching school status. This accreditation is awarded to schools which provide support for other settings in their local areas. Karis thought my proposals for the programme would strengthen her application. She was keen to host the prospective programme at her school and promote it within her network. This was a very exciting prospect and might have positive ramifications for the sustainability and future development of the programme.



## ***Consulting more widely***

I then consulted more widely, presenting my work at the Association for the Professional Development in Early Years conference and taking opportunities to discuss my ideas within my university doctoral community group. I used a variety of methods to communicate my ideas, including the mind map pictured below. I created this after my meeting with the headteachers and annotated this during this phase of my research, documenting the feedback I received. It proved a useful way of exploring and communicating my concern and the ways I was hoping to address it.



(Image of my exploratory mind-map)

I presented the mind-map at the HertsCam Annual Conference as a seminar entitled ‘Adapting the TLDW approach for the Early Years sector.’ Attendees included two senior teachers similarly interested in developing the approach in their newly established academy, which was making the transition to becoming an ‘all-through’ school catering for children and young people from 5 – 18 years of age. Colleagues from a sister network, CairoCam, were present as were MEd students and other visitors.

It was the response of one of the visitors which particularly galvanised my resolve to establish the programme. She expressed doubt in the following way.

*I don't think the learning assistants at my school could ever cope with this.*

(Research journal, June 2015)

Her response was disconcerting as it was in stark contrast to the views of the early years educators who had participated in my exploratory study, the headteachers I had consulted recently and the literature I had engaged with. The colleagues attending the seminar opposed her view. Her dissent demonstrated what I considered to be a damaging deficit view of the capacity for learning of those educators with whom she worked. Nevertheless, her response concerned me as she was a senior leader in a primary school. If this was her reaction to my proposals, then other school leaders might feel the same. Such views had implications for recruitment for my proposed programme. It also resonated with the earlier discussions I had with the headteachers concerning leaders' constructs of leadership and supportive conditions in settings for any prospective participants.

Andrea, an ex-colleague and graduate of the HertsCam MEd was present at the seminar. As a primary school SENCO who worked closely teaching assistants and governor at her own children's school, she was interested in exploring how the TLDW approach might be adopted for the early years sector. She offered to assist me with the programme: attending the sessions, making observations, and helping to document the process with me.

After consulting a range of colleagues who had scrutinised my proposal, I felt positive about the adjustments and changes I would make to the TLDW approach. The principle of non-positional leadership sat well with my focus on supporting educators enact an extended professionalism. I had secured a host school for the programme, a means to publicise the programme widely to leaders and educators and someone to support the facilitation of the session. My next step was to approach the HertsCam Network trustees to ask them to consider including the proposed programme for early years educators.

## **Securing agreement with the HertsCam Network**

Members of the HertsCam Network managing group had informally expressed interest in my proposed new programme. However, I needed to secure a firm agreement and approached the founding trustee of HertsCam Network and other members of the managing group to discuss the possibility of my multi-setting early years programme being offered on the same basis as the current TLDW programmes. This was warmly received. What caused most interest was that I envisaged that many of those who would participate in the programme would not be qualified teachers but would be drawn from the wider early years workforce. This resonated with the theory of non-positional leadership underpinning the Network's work as explained earlier. The HertsCam Network's trustees were keen for the Network to be more inclusive and have a fuller range of settings from each sector represented.

Our conversation revisited the concerns and issues which had arisen at the meeting with the three headteachers. We discussed how I might establish trust within the multi-setting group and support participants in between sessions. This would maximise the learning through dialogue and collaboration between people who have different views and experiences not only within the early years sectors but between sectors. With agreement from the HertsCam Network in place I was able to focus on the next step: promoting and developing the programme.

## **Promoting the programme**

The programme was to operate on a voluntary principle and so it needed to be promoted as widely as possible to attract potential participants. Karis and I agreed a date for an interest event to be held at the nursery school. This was to be publicised in a number of different ways, using the headteachers' extensive networks and the contacts Karis already used to publicise various events. During this period of time Karis' nursery was awarded Teaching School status and I was invited to publicise the programme at a celebration event to a wide range of individuals including early years educators, senior leaders, county council members and so forth.

I created tools to promote the programme including a flyer designed to convey key information for prospective participants. I was interested in the idea that metaphors or visual images can be particularly effective if they tap into a group's shared cultural practices (Sfard, 1998). I scoured my own photographs and found one of my younger son, aged 3, in a contemplative frame of mind, sitting in a local picturesque spot. This image was evocative of the themes prevalent in the early years community, especially the power of the natural environment as a context for learning. I hoped it would attract interest and resonate with those who saw it.

I was careful to provide enough information to help potential participants consider the appropriateness of the programme for their contextual and professional development needs. I showed the draft flyer to colleagues. One person was unconvinced by the word 'teacher' in the programme's title 'teacher-led development work.' She thought the use of the word might deter early years educators who did not have qualified teacher status from requesting more information or participating.

Within the HertsCam Network, it is understood that word teacher implies all those involved in the education of children and young people. The Network is built upon a conceptualisation of 'non-positional leadership;' that all practitioners, educators, teachers have some leadership capacity (Frost, 2014). I was keen for the future work undertaken in my programme to contribute to the knowledge being built in the Network about this concept. However, I could not assume the same understanding of everyone who might read the flyer. My intended audience for the programme was anyone working with children within the early years sector, regardless of their status or qualification. I was aware that within the communities there existed tensions, for example, about status, recognition, pay and conditions between groups including teachers and non-teachers, those in schools and those in the private sector, those who worked with babies and toddlers and those who worked with the over 3s.

I made the following decisions. I ensured that the flyer stated that all were welcome by using some common role names. I also used a smaller font for the phrase 'teacher-led development work', instead emphasising the title of the programme. I

decided to tackle the use of the word ‘teacher’ whenever I talked or promoted the programme and to use the word ‘early years educator’ in my own work; a term which I felt was inclusive.

### **Developing the programme ‘Making a difference in the early years’**

In Chapter 4 I outlined the approach taken to teacher-led development work in the HertsCam Network. The adaptations I made in order to ensure its suitability for a multi-settings group of early years educators are clarified in this section. I discuss the aims and structure of the programme that would support the enactment of extended professionalism. I also consider my role as a facilitator of the programme.

Following my exploratory study earlier in the year, I planned an action-based research project. This would include an intervention, a programme of support, that would be effective in valuing educators, helping them to forge and make the most of connections with others and supporting them as they make a difference to the lives of children and their families; transforming both themselves and their contexts. I was encouraged by others involved in similar efforts who created this statement.

Teachers really can lead innovation; teachers can build professional knowledge; teachers can really develop the capacity for leadership; and teachers really can influence their colleagues and the nature of professional practice in schools. However, what is abundantly clear is that teachers are only likely to do these things if they are provided with appropriate support.

(Frost, 2011:57)

What was a key concern for me was the phrase ‘appropriate support.’ The form of support I had in mind was not ‘training.’ I did not construe prospective participants as trainees. I did not view myself as an expert transmitting knowledge to them or addressing any perceived deficits by ‘upskilling’ them. I was rejecting prescriptive models discussed in Chapter 4. The form of support I had in mind was empowering and based on the HertsCam Network’s teacher-led development work process (TLDW).

### ***The seven steps of TLDW process***

The programme 'Making a difference in the early years' would involve my leading participants through a process based on the seven steps of TLDW (Hill, 2014). Firstly, I would assist them in identifying and articulating personal and professional values; an activity which is fundamental to exercising their professional identity as change agents (Sergiovanni, 2006). Participants would then identify a concern and negotiate with their colleagues in their setting to explore it. Visioning would become the next step in enabling participants to see differently: to consider how their practices, school environment or children's educational outcomes can be improved (Fullan, 2007). Participants would then identify a concern and negotiate with their colleagues in their setting to explore it. Next, I planned to help them to design and produce an action plan for a development project – a process of change. They would then lead the project, drawing in colleagues, children and their families, thus generating professional knowledge (based on Hill, 2014). The project then becomes a vehicle for enacting an extended professionalism; the programme a means of enabling this to happen. I aimed for the process and experience to be 'intensely practical, to bring about a more just society in which individual and collective freedoms are practised, and to eradicate the exercise and effects of illegitimate power' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007:27). The intention is to purposely create opportunities for the participants to reflect on their own professional practice, but also more widely in terms of the early childhood education sector and beyond.

### ***Pedagogical approach***

The kind of programme I had in mind would be unlikely to succeed unless it engaged professionals and enabled them to pursue and act upon their concerns. The pedagogy employed needed to account for the tasks and activities which participants would engage with, the nature of the discourse supporting learning and understanding and my own role and capabilities as I guide participants through the process (Ball and Cohen, 1999).

The approach I took reflects a social constructivist perspective, recognising that the learner constructs new ideas or concepts based on their current or past knowledge or experiences. The learner relies on cognitive structures to attach meaning to

information from new experiences. These structures in turn can be transformed by those new experiences. What is of key concern to me though is the emphasis that all cognitive functions including learning are dependent on interactions with others (e.g. teachers, peers, and parents). This means that learning is critically dependent on the qualities of a collaborative process within an educational community, which is situation specific and context bound (Eggen and Kauchak, 1999; McInerney and McInerney, 2002; Schunk, 2012). However, learning must also be seen as more than the assimilation of new knowledge by the individual, but also as the process by which learners are integrated into a knowledge community.

It relates well to pedagogical approaches commonly used in early years settings in England, which recognise the complexity of the interactive process between teacher and learner and the learning environment (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). It concerns the ‘how’ of adult and child(ren)’s interaction, recognising the importance of facilitation.

### ***Tools, tasks and activities***

The sessions I planned were broadly discursive. My responsibility to the group would be to create and use a set of clearly planned and organised tools, such as forms, facsimiles and practical tasks to facilitate beneficial interactions. I created these tools and activities over the year, taking account of the group’s interest and needs. Many are highlighted in the following narrative chapters. These were intended to provide participants with a means to reflect on their contexts, articulate their values and concerns and benefit from reciprocal challenge from the group, but also contribute to individual reflection and deliberation. By including these strategies and opportunities my research focuses attention to the spiral of self-reflection in the learning process through the development of ‘self-critical and self-reflective community’ (Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 205) I aimed to embed learning in a social process that reinforces participatory practices by means of dialogue, collaboration and networking knowledge building (Kemmis, 2010; Somekh, 2006).

The scaffolding I intended to provide for participants would enable them to contribute to knowledge building not only through their development work and

changes to practice in their settings, but also in the programme group school-based sessions, their wider network and potentially their education system. This means that professional knowledge building is reinstated in the locus of practice: the teacher and the school (Elliot, 2006; Somekh, 1995) and importantly it is enriched through ‘mode two’ learning that is socially generated, practical, trans-disciplinary and subject to multiple accountabilities (Nowotny, Scott and Gibbons, 2003).

Managing such possibly unpredictable discursive processes would require me to be similarly sensitive to the needs and differences of the individual group participants. Having dispensed with the idea of ‘the developers and the developed’ my role would be that of an enabler or a facilitator, with an expectation of learning through participation (Fleet and Patterson, 2009).

### ***The programme’s structure and content***

Here I outline how I structured the programme according to the needs of a multi-school group. I planned for the programme to be held over the forthcoming academic year and consist 6 school-based, twilight sessions. Refreshments were to be available for participants as the sessions would extend to 6.30pm. Sharing food and drink together would add to the social cohesion of the group (Mylles, 2014).

In addition to the support provided in the school-based sessions, each participant would receive one-to-one tutorials with me twice during the academic year. Tutorials would entail exploration of leadership of development work, guidance on portfolio maintenance and preparation for network events. I planned for the meetings to last twenty to thirty minutes. I decided that one of these sessions would be held at the host school during the usual ‘twilight’ timings of the sessions. For the other tutorial I was prepared to travel to the participants’ settings at a time and date that suited them. The care taken with these organisational matters would, I hoped, demonstrate to participants the ways in which the programme is designed to value them, to help them make connections and enable them to make a difference to young children’s learning and education.



Additionally, participants as members of the HertsCam Network would have a choice of two network events to participate in and attend the HertsCam Annual conference. Attendance at these networking events is mandatory to meet with the requirements of the certificated programme. However, they are an important means to knowledge building. Participants engage in a dialogic process of presenting work to each other, either in workshops or via a poster presentation, and providing reciprocal feedback (Anderson et al., 2014).

I planned the sessions and set out the detailed specification of the dates and times of sessions and the aims of each (see Appendix 7.1). I wanted this information to be available for prospective participants as soon as they expressed an interest. It would help them envisage the commitment needed to enrol on the programme.

I was therefore prepared to lead the interest event for prospective participants and senior leaders that the headteachers and I had planned and promoted earlier in the month.

### **The interest event**

We had promoted the programme widely, through numerous means. The interest event was intended to explain the programme in more depth, to meet prospective participants and pursue their commitment to enrol on the course. Again, we had decided on a 'twilight' session, considering this would be the best time for educators and senior leaders to attend. I thought it important to organise this meeting in the way that I would for the programme sessions, according value to the occasion. Outside the building, notices directed the way to the meeting room. A member of Karis' team was ready to greet people at the door. A small room had been organised with refreshments. I had organised a register, music was playing softly, information such as the programme flyer, the year's timetable for the programme, enrolment forms and HertsCam publications were available. Karis was a little disappointed with the number of places that had been booked and we were expecting approximately 8 people. By the time the meeting was due to start over 35 people

were in attendance. These included four headteachers and educators from a wide variety of different settings.

In the small, over-crowded room I spent some time explaining the transformative aims of the programme, its structure, cost and so forth. I explained the programme was a new innovation but emphasised the link with an already established Network and the types of development work undertaken. I emphasised the process-orientated nature of the programme, one that supports extended professionalism via reflection, dialogue, consultation, collaboration, networking, leadership and knowledge. I clarified how the project was related to my own research and the concerns that had motivated me to create the programme.

I was to be transparent about my own professional experience and my researching role. I outlined the concern that provoked my study. I intended for this to mitigate any perceived ethical tension about what it means to be a participant in the programme but also involved in the research process. One prospective participant seemed to understand this well, saying, 'We're not going to be subjects – we're pioneers.' My presentation was met by a round of applause. Questions followed all of which were concerned with practicalities for example, clarifying session timings, participation and so on. I had many conversations with individuals following this. I was overwhelmed with the positive feedback and eagerness that the short meeting generated.

In my research journal I scribbled the following.

*So much excitement this evening. Great conversations with so many people. One lady said she liked the fact that you get to choose your own problem to work on. And another mentioned it would be really interesting to talk and share with people from secondary schools.*

(Research journal, May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2015)

I was intrigued by a primary deputy head and headteacher who had attended accidentally, after confusing the event with another one scheduled later in the week. They had stayed to hear what I had to say. The headteacher said she was very keen to 'send' one of her teaching assistants. I was pleased to hear the headteacher's

positive comments about the intended programme and its aims. The notion of being ‘sent’ on a course however, was at odds with the volunteerism underpinning the Network’s approach to leadership development (Bolat, 2013). It also harked back to the hierarchical and centralised nature of the ‘upskilling’ discourse prevalent in the professionalisation of the early years sector (MacNaughton, 2005). I wondered about the educator the headteacher had in mind. Would she view the programme as an inconvenience or would her participation be tokenistic not all educators are equally willing to engage in such initiatives (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2013)? This participant was Violet whose work I refer to throughout the narrative chapters.

### ***The participants***

By the beginning of July 2015 I recruited 15 participants to the first early years multi-setting TLDW group. A range of roles was represented (see Figure 7A:2 below).

Having been worried that the cost of the programme (£350 per person) might be prohibitive, it was pleasing to see that a number of those participating were from non-maintained settings. The diverse roles occupied by the participants would ensure a range of perspectives from the sector were represented. The inclusion of participants with a range of ages, experiences and positions would enrich the dialogue further.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Job title</b>	<b>Setting</b>
Amanda	Early Years Practitioner	Day Care Nursery
Louise	Early Years Practitioner	Maintained Nursery School
Gina	Early Years Practitioner	Maintained Nursery School
Keely	Early Years Practitioner	Maintained Nursery School
Debbie	Primary School teachers	Maintained Primary School
Wanda	Primary School teacher	Maintained Primary School
Nadia	Pre-School leader	Community Pre-School
Selina	Nursery School teacher	Maintained Nursery School
Sally	Nursery School teacher	Maintained Nursery School
Zoe	Nursery School teacher	Maintained Nursery School
Christine	Nursery School teacher	Maintained Nursery School
Violet	Teaching Assistant	Maintained Primary School
Colette	Early Years Teacher	Day Care setting
Samira	Early Years Teacher	Maintained Nursery School
Janet	Early Years Practitioner	Children’s Centre

**Figure 7A.1:** List of participants with their roles and setting type

In the final section of this chapter I summarise the action undertaken in the preparatory stage of my research. I also explain what I have learned in this phase.

### **Chapter summary and emerging understandings**

In this first of four critical narrative chapters I recounted the preparatory stage of my intervention. This comprised my carrying out activities to establish the favourable conditions for developing the programme ‘Making a difference in the early years.’ The first step was to meet with colleagues who might act as collaborators and enablers, giving me critical feedback and practical help with my proposed strategy. Securing the agreement of the HertsCam Network board of trustees ensured that the programme participants would be part of a vibrant pre-existing community and that the programme would be certificated. Due to the invitational nature of the programme, I employed a variety of methods for promoting it to prospective participants and senior leaders across the sector in the county. I developed the programme, adapting both its content and resourcing to suit the early years education context and considered the facilitative pedagogy I would employ.

The preparatory stage helped me create certain conditions without which the programme might have floundered. The following is what I have learned from this stage. My emerging understandings comprise insights, issues, challenges and principles that I carried with me into the next stage of the research.

Establishing collaborative partnerships was essential. This secured the commitment, interest and support of individuals who assisted me in establishing the viability of the programme and promoting it within the local early years education sector. Instead of designing the programme independently, I worked with local professional and institutional contexts, collaborating with key colleagues and stakeholders. The dialogue enabled me to adapt the typical TLDW approach to suit the needs of early years educators and a multi-setting context, which would make the programme more effective.

An important insight is that support from their settings would be a crucial variable in prospective participants' experiences, as the programme would not be merely school-based, but school-focussed. Participants would be reflecting on their identities and developing their practice in the context of their own settings. In part the extent to which they might accomplish this would be dependent on the professional culture of their settings. Engaging in teacher-led development work might be perceived as a threat to usual ways of working in some settings. Even in those settings where this approach might be embraced initially, some conditions might not enable participants actions to flourish. Physical and temporal space might not be forthcoming if senior leaders are unconvinced or unaware of the benefits of supporting individuals to act agentially. My aim was for teacher leadership to be recognised as a legitimate and worthwhile expression of an extended professionalism in participants' settings. This was a challenge, but in conjunction with stakeholders I planned a programme and an approach to ameliorate this.

A further adaptation concerned the typical TLDW process of collating evidence of participation and the way in which this is presented for assessment purposes. An outcome of the discussion with key colleagues was a method to augment the reflective element of the participants' portfolios during the TLDW process.

A key issue was the problem of nomenclature and the repercussions of this for professional identity within the early years sector. This surfaced whilst I was promoting the programme and creating the resources for this. I took steps to resolve it but anticipated that not only the concept, but the terminology employed in the phrases 'teacher leadership' and 'teacher-led development work' would need careful explanation throughout the entire intervention.

A significant challenge was the conceptualisation of the pedagogical approach I would take. I was convinced of the need for a constructivist approach to this but there was an issue arising from its adoption. Facilitation of learning and knowledge building by means of dialogic activities and opportunities for deliberation would cast me as an enabler and not a trainer. Telling would not be part of my teaching repertoire. I was aware that such a non-traditional approach might be unexpected by

prospective participants and their senior leaders. I ensured that this was conveyed explicitly at the following ‘interest’ event but was aware that it might be misconstrued.

The unexpected high attendance at the interest event confirmed there was a local appetite for support for teacher leadership. The presence of senior leaders gave me hope that there would be support for participants beyond the confines of the programme itself. The cohort of 15 participants from diverse contexts and with a wide range of roles secured the range of perspectives I had wished for.

Once this stage of my intervention had been completed I was better prepared for launching the programme in the new academic term September 2015. The phase had enabled me to develop the following conditions. I had managed to do the following.

- secure the support and commitment of local senior leaders
- generate discussion about the nature of professionalism in the early years
- adapt the TLDW programme in collaboration with others
- develop a strategy for promoting the programme
- recruit a good number of participants

The following chapter presents the beginning stages of the programme the following academic year and how I facilitated participants engagement with the programme.

## **Chapter 7B**

### **Engaging with the programme**

This chapter represents the beginning stages of the programme over a period of three months from October – December 2015 during which time participants attended three sessions, a network event and an individual tutorial. Engaging with the first four steps of the TLDW model, participants clarified their professional values. By tapping into their moral purpose, participants began to identify a concern which becomes the focus of their development work. They negotiated with colleagues to explore that concern. For most participants, this was the first time they have engaged in such professional dialogue. Following these negotiations, I guided participants to design and produce an action plan for their development work detailing, a sequence of planned activities.

Each of these is discussed in the following chapter, but I begin by explaining how I set the environment for learning.

#### **Creating the physical environment**

I took care to provide a welcoming learning environment for the participants. The participants generally did not know each other. I wanted to establish a welcoming atmosphere, partly to put participants at ease but also to assist the growth of critical friendships within the group. I understood that collaboration would stand a better chance if the group had strong social bonds (Mylles, 2017). Parking facilities, toilets and the meeting room were all signposted. The caretaker had kindly arranged the room for me with rows of chairs facing a long table holding the power point projector. He found me rearranging the room and eyed me curiously as I told him the participants needed to be able to see and talk to each other, rather than focus on me, and that I would not be using the power point projector. I provided refreshments, sweets to share on each table and stationery for the participants, including brightly coloured folders. Also, on each table were baskets of markers, pens and sticky notes. I had a registration table by the door where I greeted

participants with name tags. I set up another table with books, academic journals and professional literature pertaining to early years education.

Participants began to arrive. We greeted each other and I introduced participants to each other. Participants made hot drinks, looked at the book table and found themselves a seat. There was a good deal of laughter as everyone seemed to want a purple coloured folder.

### **Creating the conditions for a safe environment**

The first activity of the first session encouraged further openness. In my individualised welcome email, I had asked the participants to send me an interesting fact about themselves. These were anonymised and collated on a sheet for a ‘human bingo’ activity. Instead of the usual introductions made in turn around a group, the participants were energised and animated trying to discover which one of them for example, had five grandchildren and who had spent the Summer holiday trekking in the Andes.



(Participants engaging in activity, Session 1 on 17.9.15)

Some participants recalled meeting each other in the previous academic year at a training event, two were previous colleagues, others were engaging with colleagues from differing early years settings for the first time. This was more than a light-hearted icebreaker. I had intentionally sought introduce participants to each other in this way. It set the tone for the dialogic activities to follow but importantly, was the first step in what I hoped was the creation of a safe environment.



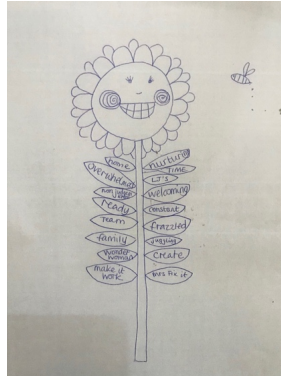
The session also involved compiling a set of ground rules for the programme. Individuals were asked to record on sticky notes three rules they felt were important for establishing good working relationships for the group.

I created a poster of these to be displayed at each session and participants were asked to sign this to demonstrate their agreement with the rules they had suggested. I hoped this would demonstrate the importance of developing relational trust (Timperley, 2015). Such trust might enable participants to engage respectfully with perspectives that differ from their own in order to flourish and learn; I envisaged a group where participants would appreciate being sincerely listened to and understood, rather than just being heard (Kaser and Halbert, 2009:50).

### **Beginning identity work**

Step 1 of the TLDW process involves participants reflecting on their core values and their identities as educators. The premise here is that these reflections are the starting point for the process of developing, engaging and using an extended professionalism (Wood and Bennett, 2000).

One of the first tasks I planned in the first session was an invitation for the participants to make a visual representation to demonstrate their current experience of being an early years educator. It was a non-serious task that took seriously ‘the teacher’s purpose, the teacher as a person and the real-world context in which teachers work’ (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992: 27). I was prepared for there to be a cry of ‘I’m no artist!’ and so I introduced the activity carefully, ensuring that participants recognised that this was a task intended to give them time to reflect and think about what mattered to them in their work with young children and families. The artistic merit of the representation was not of importance but the reflection and the dialogue that followed was key. I found the activity acted as a ‘tin-opener’ for critical conversations about the participants’ perceptions of their role and professional identity. Amanda created the following drawing, entitled ‘My professional smile.’



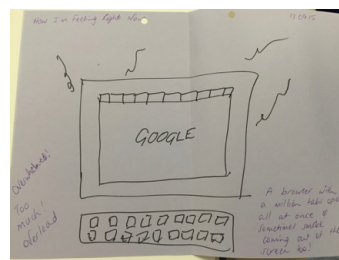
(Amanda's representation created in session 15.9.15)

Amanda took the opportunity to share with the larger group her feelings about her work and her perceptions about her identity. Despite the challenges of her role she was determined that she would present nothing less than a 'professional' face to children, parents and colleagues.

*I have to be so many things to so many people. But there's so much... contradiction in what I do and what I'm feeling... I am nurturing... but I'm frazzled by my workload. I do get overwhelmed but my work...It's important and it's important to me that I'm doing something worthwhile...and well I've called my picture my professional smile because that's what I do.*

(Research journal 17.9.15)

The sense of being overwhelmed, but absolutely committed to working with young children, is also demonstrated in Debbie's representation below, which she named 'All tabs are open' in an attempt to convey the complexities of her role, the competing tasks she needed to accomplish and her perceived expectations that senior leaders had of her.



(Debbie's representation created in session 15.9.15)

Debbie was realistic about the difficulties and busyness of the job, whilst resolutely maintaining her focus on children's learning and well-being. Violet, too, reflected on her professional values.

*I am committed to listening to children and recognising their interests. I try hard to provide a stimulating environment and opportunities for them to explore and express their thoughts and ideas...I think it's part of my role to model for children how to respect one another, our environment and our resources, and how to keep everyone safe.*

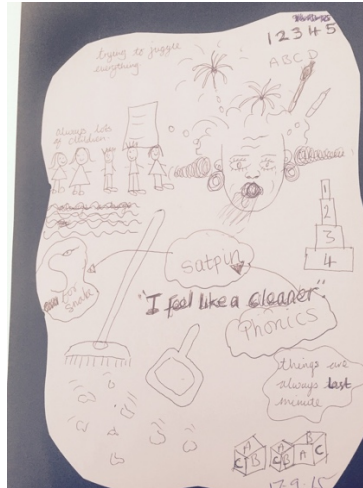
(Violet, written initial reflection 23.9.15)

These examples might suggest that professional identities of early years educators are susceptible to prevalent normalising discourse, which position them as 'preternaturally stoic, compliant, self-sacrificing and motivated by the intrinsic rewards of working with young children' (Sumison, 2004:288). Such self-denying attitudes might breed or feed complacency amongst employers, or be indicative of a workforce composed of overly compliant individuals. However, I realised that what the participants were vocalising was actually a very strong sense of commitment and passion about their work. The discussion between the members of the group was disrupting the image of a downtrodden worker and was instead revealing a highly attuned moral dimension to the identities of the participants. I put this to the group. The following comment indicates the mood of the ensuing discussion.

*Downtrodden? Maybe in some ways... but I want to do this job. I could go and work in a supermarket but that's not what I want in life.*

(Participant comment, Research journal 15.9.15)

Each participant indicated a similar passionate commitment to make a difference to children's learning and life chances. The discussion in this first session moved on. The participants were quick to list many routines and tasks which impacted less favourably on their work with young children. Violet found several aspects of her work tiresome. Her representation shows queues of needy children and a large dust pan and brush.



(Violet's representation created in session 15.9.15)

However, other types of situations were encountered that participants viewed as 'morally wearing' (Craig, 1995). For example, sharing the above representation with her fellow participants enabled Violet to initiate a discussion about the approach to teaching synthetic phonics advanced by national policy.

*How can you teach phonics to a barely 4-year-old like that? One little boy cannot locate where a sound is coming from in a room. He can't match noises to everyday items...and I have to assess how well he can blend sounds in CVC (consonant-verb-consonant) words! It's just not appropriate.*

(Participant comment, Research journal 15.9.15)

Many participants told similar stories, indicating the level to which professional independence and a culture of trust are being replaced by restrictive conceptualisations of effective teaching and learning in the early years (Osgood, 2012; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). The intensity of the discussions, and the clearly expressed emotional engagement with their work, particularly struck a chord with my aims for supporting the early years educators. These were circumstances in which the participants experienced incongruence between their beliefs and enforced practices. I realised though that these dilemmas, and the dissonance they created, might also act as a catalyst for participants to reclaim ownership over their practice. At this moment I truly understood that mobilising such tremendous passion or moral purpose was key to supporting them in developing and using an enhanced professionalism to make a difference in their settings.

The desire to protect the learning and well-being of young children is described as the ‘ethic of care’ by McDowall and Murray (2012:45). For Taggart (2011) working with this ethic involves the maintenance of caring relationships between educators, children and families. It functions to place children’s needs and interests at the forefront of decision-making. They further propose that where this exists in conjunction with moral purpose, what is produced is an emotional drive that they term ‘passionate care.’

Passionate care is an active state (Moyle, 2001; Day, 2004). It is put into practice when a desire to make a difference is coupled with the belief that improvements can be made. It has been argued by Marquardt (2000:3) that ‘true leadership emerges from those whose prime motivation is to help others.’ I was excited by this, it was highly resonant with my understanding of extended professionalism and the concept of non-positional leadership promoted by the HertsCam Network.

What I found perplexing though was a focus in the literature on ‘self-leadership’ and internal drive. The levels of autonomy, persistence, resilience and self-belief in many cases are impressive. I had no reservations that each new participant in my programme could achieve this, my early conversations indicated having support to work in this way was crucial. After all, the participants had enrolled on a programme that was marketed as a means of supporting them to make such a difference. Frost (2011) is forthright about this.

Teachers really can lead innovation; teachers really can build professional knowledge; teachers really can develop the capacity for leadership, and teachers really can influence their colleagues and the nature of professional practice in their schools. However, what is abundantly clear is that teachers are only likely to do these things if they are provided with appropriate support.

(Frost, 2011: 57)

Samira’s reflections after the session demonstrate her understanding of the need for such supportive structures to help her put her moral purpose into action.

*Before this I thought my views didn’t matter. But I’m starting to feel like I’m finding my voice. I can’t change the world but I can do what’s right for the*

*children in my setting. I think the course and the people on it will help me do this.*

(Samira, Record of participation, 15.9.15)

Samira's comment succinctly recalls those enabling factors emerging from my earlier exploratory study: the need for support for early years educators in making a difference, being valued and making connections. A further activity in the first session assisted with helping participants taking the next step in deciding how they might begin to make this difference.

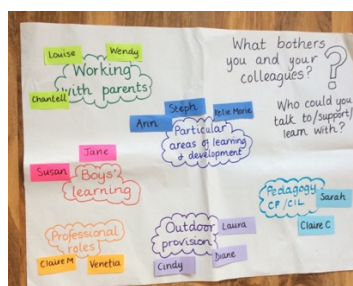
### **Identifying a concern**

Step 2 of the TLDW process is to begin to identify a focus of practice for development. I was keen to maximise both participants' strength of feeling and the degree to which discussions had illuminated shared concerns. I gave participants opportunity to spend time individually reflecting about a concern they might have in their work. I asked them 'what bothers you?' I reassured them this was a starting point for finding a focus for development and that their concerns might shift and be honed over time as they refined their ideas in the light of consultation with their colleagues and with each other.

I considered personal agenda setting would be a powerful driver in helping the participants enact an extended sense of professionalism, releasing intense enthusiasm, sustain their interest and so mobilise their moral purpose (Frost, 2012). Moral purpose here refers to the way Fullan used the term in the early 1990s to refer to teaching as a moral enterprise. Similarly, Moyles' (2001) and Simpson's (2010) work demonstrate the strong social mission at the heart of early years professional identity and motivation, regardless of formal position. Arguably, moral purpose is unleashed within people when they are given leadership opportunities to pursue issues related to their personal passions and concerns. What is distinct though was that I was not 'giving' them the opportunity, I was facilitating the unleashing of their

potential to develop their leadership capacity as part of their developing professionalism.

The group briefly shared their concerns whilst I made the following representation.



(Participants' concerns, session 1 on 15.9.15)

Having the resources to hand to quickly produce this representation meant participants were able to connect with new colleagues with a similar interest. This provided the starting point for further reflection to hone ideas for a workable focus but also helped create working relationships with others who were to become critical friends throughout the programme and beyond.

This was a key moment to enable them to make connections with each other. The tool recreated below was devised to help participants make links with each other and to capture their thinking in the moment.

HertsCam Network

**Task 1: Learning from each other**

Talk with your colleagues about what you

- would like to improve ...
- want to develop a new way of doing...
- would like to create strategies for ...
- would like to change about the way we ...
- want to help us to find a new way to deal with
- why this is important

**Make some notes:**

How was this grouping helpful?

Who did I link with? Could I visit their setting?

What has this helped me consider?

What can we learn from each other?

(Tool from session 1 on 15.9.15)

What appeared to be important in the ensuing discussions was the element of mutuality. Belonging to such a group as this is vital for the cultivation of ‘virtuous friendship,’ to use an Aristotelian term (Nixon, 2006). Such discursive activities seemed to provide support in the sense that participants recognised common concerns and empathised with each other.

*At this session I discovered how much I valued other members opinions and ideas and these would help us to move my own ideas about a development project forward.*

(Selina, Portfolio reflection, September 2015)

I intended for the sessions to develop as a forum for participants, providing protected time and space for them to reflect, to articulate their ideas and benefit from of reciprocal challenge. Nevertheless, I was mindful of the necessity to be sensitive to the needs and experiences of the individual group members. Despite recognising their common purpose as early years educators, there was great diversity between participants’ roles and working conditions. I had to be aware of the perceived and actual difference in status, for example. One participant was a teaching assistant in a primary school – she had half-jokingly referred to herself as ‘the lowest of the low’ in a previous conversation. There were also 3 very experienced nursery school deputy headteachers in the group. I had not appreciated until the end of the first session that these deputy heads had previously offered support and consultation to others in the group. I was alert to the impact of these factors on participants’ willingness to speak out about their concerns and worries or reticence to perhaps divulge or discuss dilemmas in their workplaces.

Nevertheless, the first session appeared to have been successful. Karis noted her impressions of the tone of the evening.

*A very positive session with great focus and fun. Some trepidation about writing and managing workload balanced by the support that will be offered by the group and the excitement of a new project.*

(Karis, Research journal, September 2015)



Providing an early opportunity for participants to explore identity and make values explicit appeared to be a useful strategy. For Sally there is a sense of validation and recognition that passionate care is going to be a key driver to effect change.

*Thinking about my role and identity has helped me find a starting point. By reflecting on my present concerns I think I'm now able to begin to think about how to take the project forward.*

(Sally, Record of participation, 15.9.15)

This first session had a profound impact on my thinking. It reminded me of the challenge from Rinaldi (2006:123) to reconsider the image of the child as a learner who is 'strong, powerful and rich in potential.' This conceptualisation reinforced my conviction that adults who work with young children ought to be recast and valued as similarly capable and resourceful adult learners. It also reminded me that I was not there to liberate participants but instead occupied a privileged position to support their development.

### **Considering leadership in the early years**

The first session appeared to have been successful in enabling participants to have greater clarity about their moral purpose. However, I could not presume that this alone would lead to participants setting a process of change into action. The second session was planned with the following words in mind.

Moral purpose cannot just be stated. It must be accompanied by strategies for realising it - and those strategies are the leadership actions that energise people to pursue a goal.

(Fullan, 2001)

Supporting participants' assertiveness and capacity to act on this i.e. the agential aspect to their professionalism was of concern for me in the second session. There was much to introduce in this session. I wanted participants to consider their understanding of 'leadership' and what leadership actions they might employ to realise changes in practice. I was also keen to provide them with a tool that would help them envisage the various elements the project might involve.

This session began with a number of activities which were intended to help participants consider the notion of leadership and how this might relate to their work. My understanding of the enactment of leadership as a feature of extended professionalism reflects Yukl's (2010) definition. It is about having intentional influence over others, to guide structure and facilitate activities and relationships. My expectation was that this conceptualisation of leadership might be unexpected or less well understood by participants than other models.

I might have merely explained my view of leadership to the participants. However, such a transmission approach was not in-keeping with my understanding of how to introduce new concepts or facilitate a discussion to adult learners. I wanted to disrupt what I anticipated would be participants' ways of routine ways of thinking about leadership. Therefore, I planned two activities to help me understand and gauge their perceptions before I introduced the concept of non-positional leadership, as referred to in Chapter 4.

I placed posters of people who might be construed as famous leaders were placed around the room. With a cup of tea and a biscuit, participants moved singly or in small clusters around the room from different starting points, listing how or what they thought contributed to these individuals' success (or failure) as leaders. This starter activity caused much levity and participants could be heard comparing ideas and stories related to each of the people. I did not ask participants to feedback their ideas to the group but immediately posed a question for them to contemplate: what does it mean to lead in the early years?

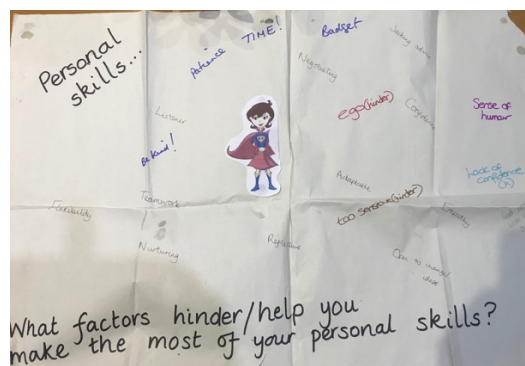
Responses to this question were captured by means of a tool that drew on the work of Rodd (2005) who explicates a typology of leadership for the early years education sector (see Figure 7B.1 below). I prepared 3 large sheets of paper each labelled with one of the aspects from Rodd's framework. In the previous session I recalled one participant had remarked, 'you have to be superwoman in our job.' Consequently, I had added such an image to each piece of sheet of paper. This was an intentional provocation to help me frame a discussion about the nature of leadership. I wanted to impress upon the participants that there were many individuals who did indeed

appear to have superhuman qualities, however, an alternative view is possible. But first, in self-selected groups, the participants moved around the tables adding their thoughts to each sheet of paper.

Personal characteristics	Professional skills	Roles and responsibilities
Kind, warm, friendly Nurturant, sympathetic Patient	Technical competence as an early childhood professional in order to act as a model, guide and mentor	To deliver and be accountable for a quality service  To develop and articulate a philosophy, values and vision
Self-aware, Knowledgeable Rational, logical, analytical	General administration  Financial management	To engage in collaborative and partnership approaches  To engage in ongoing professional development and to encourage it in all staff
Confident, Visionary Mentor and guide, empowering	Effective communication	To be sensitive and responsive to the need for change and manage change effectively
Assertive, proactive Goal oriented	Human resource management	To act as an advocate for children, parents, staff, the profession and the general community

**Figure 7B.1:** Typology of early years leadership (Rodd, 2005)

We compared the group's responses to Rodd's typology. I was unsurprised that the participants' contributions for professional characteristics and skills were similar to those elicited for Rodd's work.



(Tool used in session 1, 15.9.15)

I asked participants to consider what factors hindered them in each area, for example, participants in positional roles, such as the nursery school deputy headteachers, particularly emphasised the time commitment involved with managing personnel and safeguarding issues.

This activity, and opportunity for the participants to relate the three aspects to their own role, indicated the pervasive notion of a traditional view of leadership and highlighted its limitations. One participant mentioned how she often utilised the skills, even though they were not necessarily recognised as part of her nursery nurse role. Another said she although she possessed many of the personal characteristics, she had not engaged with the tasks, as these were the designated responsibilities of others within the setting.

It was noticeable that the following tasks or capacities from Rodd's list were either omitted or mentioned only fleetingly by participants.

- engage in collaborative and partnership approaches
- engage in ongoing professional development and to encourage it in all staff
- be sensitive and responsive to the need for change and manage change effectively
- act as an advocate for children, parents, staff, the profession and the general community

These reflections helped me facilitate further discussion about how leadership is constructed and understood. Whilst sharing the photograph below, I read aloud assertion that

At its heart, the traditional view of leadership is based on assumptions of people's powerlessness, their lack of personal vision and inability to master the forces of change, deficits which can be remedied only by a few great leaders.

(Senge, 1993:340)

This was an attempt to help participants consider traditional thinking about leadership and its impact on themselves. I asked the participants to contemplate whether there was a possibility of thinking differently about leadership, and whether this might be a prospective part of their professional development as early years educators, no matter their current role or status in their settings. Such a view of leadership would involve them engaging in collaboration, initiating and managing change and acting as an advocate for the sector. The photograph below was used to accompany the challenge. It is evocative of Katzenmeyer and Moller's (2009) claim that educators within all schools represent a 'sleeping giant' of leadership potential, which might prove a strong catalyst for leading the changes that enhance children's life chances.



(Photograph from the Lost Gardens of Heligan)

### **Understanding non-positional leadership**

A key hurdle was to establish a shared understanding of the concept of leadership, as explained in a previous chapter, because it tends to be assumed that leadership is inextricably linked to position or status. I needed to explain how their capacity to make a difference in the early years was dependent on a different understanding of leadership. I was keen to help participants reframe their thinking so that the focus was diverted from personhood to the process of leadership (MacBeath et al., 2018). I wanted to critique the idea of leadership as the domain of those at the top of institutional hierarchy. I wanted them to understand that leadership may be exercised without positional power or status or responsibility (Lambert, 2003) or indeed, super-human powers. I shared with them the work of Frost and the HertsCam Network.

We believe that all teachers and education practitioners have some leadership capacity. After all, leadership is a dimension of being human... it should be seen as an essential part of teachers' professionalism.

(www.hertscam.org.uk)

I understood for some these ideas might be new or confusing. Participants' body language suggested to me they were engaged but, they appeared quite quiet as I made this proposition. Karis, who was observing the session, noted the following.

*Lots of interest in the photo of the sleeping giant. All very curious and intent. Interesting responses to your challenge with nods and gazes and personal reflections.*

(Research journal, 1.10.15)

I gave the participants time to reflect individually and record their thoughts in their session participation records. Some participants like Violet took time to process the content of the discussion. It was gratifying to hear that for her (a teaching assistant) this had been an invitation to further reflection.

*...because that gave me an insight into myself, how I saw leadership, and now I've actually been questioning it in my setting, and questioning what the meaning of leadership is... It was quite an insight because I got to see what the other participants were thinking ...*

(Violet, Tutorial December

2015)

However, Samira made the following comments

*Leadership is not a title – it's for everyone. We can collaborate and support each other. Can I actually do this? Will it work?*

(Samira, Record of participation, 1.10.15)

Samira's lack of confidence demonstrates the unusualness of the approach to extended professionalism and underlines the need for express support for its enactment.

## Development work

The key vehicle for supporting teacher leadership is development work. My intention was that the programme would enable participants to enact an extended professionalism by initiating, designing and leading projects. The term ‘project’ here is not construed as research or enquiry; the projects subsequently designed and led by the participants constitute *development work* which, within the HertsCam Network, is defined as:

strategic, focused and deliberate action intended to bring about improvements in professional practice. It takes the form of collaborative processes featuring activities such as consultation, negotiation, reflection, self-evaluation and deliberation which take place in planned sequence.

(Frost, Ball, Hill and Lightfoot, 2017)

Because development projects are necessarily collaborative, they tend to have a transformative effect on the school’s organisational structures and professional culture. These result in improvements in aspects of professional practice and thus better learning outcomes for children in schools. The leadership of development projects in schools enhances participants’ moral purpose and leadership capacity (Mylles, 2005; Frost, 2012) in tandem with the development of professional practice which has an impact on children’s learning (Eltemamy, 2017; Ramahi, 2017). However, the ripples of this are planned to be experienced more widely.

The TLDW programmes support teachers as they plan for their projects to have maximum impact and assess the impact of these innovations. A framework was devised in collaboration with teachers carrying out development work for the purpose of planning, analysis and reflection on their action (Frost and Durrant, 2002). This is summarised below.

Impact on pupils’ learning  
*attainment/disposition/meta-cognition*

Impact on teachers  
*classroom practice/personal capacity/interpersonal capacity*

Impact on the school as an organisation  
*structures and processes/culture and capacity*

Impact beyond the school  
*critique and debate/creation and transfer of professional  
knowledge/improvements in social capital in the community*

(Hill, 2004)

This framework underpinned a guided, practical activity I devised that was intended to help participants envisage their projects as a time-bound process that foregrounds leadership, collaboration and innovation. The plan focuses on the process required to work out a solution, to improve practice (Ben-David and Orion, 2013). Helping them appreciate that leadership is a strategic process was key to their enactment of enhanced professionalism.

Each project plan produced was therefore personalised and relevant to a participant's context. The focus did not dwell on technical and managerial aspects of educating young children as emphasised in centrally produced policy, neither did they involve making choices from and implementing ready-made methods or solutions. Each plan was the result of participants deliberating on fundamental questions such as

What do we want for our children? What is a good childhood? Who do we think children are? What is the purpose of early years education.

(Moss and Petrie, 2002:11)

Such critical thinking helped participants interrogate usual ways of working. As a result, their plans incorporated possibilities rather than necessities, and questions rather than givens. Below is an example of Sally's project plan that was initially created during the session.



(Sally's development project plan, Session 2, 1.10.15)



The steps to designing the project plan were as follows. Sally began her action plan by briefly outlining her initial concern about provision for child-led learning in her setting (the large purple post-it note on the far left of the image). The large orange post-it on the right of the image represents her ideal future state once she has addressed the concern and acted to shift practice in her setting.

The journey between these two points was then problematised. Various coloured notes were used to demonstrate her ideas about components of the time-bound plan, including key activities and tasks, materials, resources and financial implications. Crucially, Sally and her co-participants were encouraged to think about and incorporate into this plan, opportunities to consult with her colleagues and discuss the viability, progress and gradual impact of the project on all those involved. These key points are allocated to specific points on the timeline. Over the coming months the plan was then used as a reflective tool. Sally amended and annotated her journey during the academic year, demonstrating how the plan shifted and was improved as she sought to make a difference in her setting.

This approach is similar to Engestom's (2000) model of 'knot working' in which a group of colleagues collectively root out common causes of a shared concern in everyday practice. What is different here though is that Sally is planning how to lead a process of consultation and development, rather than merely creating and managing the completion of a number of tasks. Consequently, participants were encouraged in the session to reflect on the context for change, questioning existing practice, considering obstacles and affordances that may arise and to share these observations with each other. This dialogue goes some way to addressing Starratt's (2007) challenge to create a model of professional development to build a community of learners 'engaged in a moral and intellectual understanding of who they are and what their relationships and responsibilities are to the natural, social and cultural worlds,' as they undertake leaderful activity.

Sally offered the following evaluation of this tool during the December tutorial.

*This enabled me to visualise the journey and helped me think about being strategic about what I wanted to accomplish. I have learnt how to*

*breakdown a project into manageable sections - I thought about the possible challenge, the resources I might need, actions needed and ongoing impact. It helped me realise there were different parts to my project that needed attention. It helped us all to put into perspective the amount of work that would need to go into our project.*

(Sally, Tutorial record, December 2015)

Her developing understanding of leadership as a process is evident. Opportunities for participants to further critique their own burgeoning leadership capacity and that which they encounter within their own settings were built into the programme over the academic year as described. Having secured the programme as part of the suite of programmes offered by HertsCam Network meant that the participants were members of a large network of teachers and educators also involved in carrying out development work. The role these events played in developing participants' professionalism I explain next.

### **The value of networking**

The two sessions were followed by a Network Event in mid-October 2015. Face-to-face networking events are organised by the members of the HertsCam Network each year. The networking programme is largely self-supporting with events being hosted at schools where TLDW programmes are held. This ensures that costs are minimal but members of the network are invested in the process and the levels of ownership are high. Those participating in the TLDW programmes and the Network's MEd course lead workshops, others display posters about their development work as a means of prompting discussion with their peers.

Accounts from the HertsCam Network demonstrate that teachers gain a great deal from meeting with like-minded colleagues (Anderson et al 2014). Although they may not have met before, realising that a common endeavour is shared, provides tremendous encouragement for all involved. Self-efficacy flourishes as individuals begin to think differently about what they can achieve. Frost (2014) signals that this is achieved in a number of ways at Network events. He notes the emotional dimension of the experience and the respectful environment, which lends itself to

creating the conditions for open discussion, exchange of ideas, tolerance of difference, empathy and reflection. My research journal describe the participants reactions to this first event.

*The first network event of the year was hosted at a local secondary school. The geographical location was convenient for most participants. About 6 of the group were sitting huddled around a table. I noticed some hadn't taken off their coats or helped themselves to refreshments. I greeted them warmly. 'Sarah, everyone's wearing suits!' said Janet. I'm covered in poster paint.' said another. 'What will they think of us?' One participant recalled, 'The last time I was in a senior school it was because my son had misbehaved on a school trip.'*

(Research journal, 16.10.15)

Although I reassured the participants that secondary school colleagues, and our masters degree participants, had much to learn from them, their unease was tangible. There appeared to be two dimensions to this distinct emotional response to the secondary school environment.

First, I realised that being in such an environment seemed to evoke unpleasant or negative memories of disempowerment from their own schooling, or their more recent experiences as parents of school-aged children. These appeared to be preventing them engaging with the Network event in the way Frost (2014) and Anderson et al., (2014) anticipate. Second, their reactions to the event, and their perceptions about the people attending, appeared to emphasise how enmeshed professional identity is in a broader societal discourse (Maloney, 2010). Mahony and Hayes (2006) identify a particular discourse in which that the early years education sector is characterised by a lack of professionalism, low salaries, lack of training and poor working conditions. Such factors appear to have undermined the professional identity of some of the participants. I considered that their reactions might be representative of the perceptions they have developed of themselves in relation to their societal value and their presumed status in the education system (Tucker, 2004; Dalli, 2008; Urban, 2008).

What I had not realised was that two of the participants left the event early. They talked with me about their discomfort at a later date. Amanda (an early years practitioner) expressed a heightened feeling of 'not belonging.' Wanda (a teacher)

could not connect with or appreciate there might commonalities between the experiences of initiating, planning and leading projects that across phases of the education sector.

*I found this event a little disappointing, as the relevance to early years was very limited. I struggled with the content of the workshops so I decided not to stay.*

(Wanda, Portfolio reflective commentary, October, 2015)

I reflected that I might have better prepared participants for this event. I could understand the sense of alienation but had not accounted for participants experiencing this degree of dissonance. This extract from my research journal demonstrates my disappointment.

*Such views are really unhelpful. It demonstrates a restricted professionalism. I wonder if they think of themselves as practitioners, doers rather than thinkers. It might purely be a matter of confidence. I need to help them recognise that they have something valuable to give. I also need to emphasise that at the network events it's the opportunity for sharing an understanding of the process of development work that is key.*

(Research journal, October 2015)

For other programme participants attending a Network event was an introduction to the possibilities of belonging to a nurturing community of like-minded colleagues. Christine, a nursery school deputy headteacher noted

*Up to now focussing on my concerns was fairly easy but finding solutions was a big step. Being at the network event and listening to stories even though mostly from secondary colleagues has helped to support my views and ideas and how I might manage the project.*

(Christine, Record of participation, October 1.10.15)

This focus on useful practical advice gleaned to help with decisions about the scope and direction of a project plan was also noted by Debbie.

*By listening to stories of completed projects it made me think about the size of my own project and what I can realistically achieve.*

(Debbie, Record of participation, 14.10.15)

Selina, however, was bold in her participation. She had contributed little verbally in the first two sessions. Her shyness in the group was evident nevertheless, at this early stage in the year she had a very clear focus for her project. It was based on her passion for dancing and a recognition of the connection between the development of gross and fine motor skills in young children. She was keen to develop teaching strategies that would maximise the enhancement of fine motor skills through movement to music. Selina's initial ideas recognised the needs of a particular cohort. She was seeking out relevant academic and professional literature and beginning to appraise other school's approaches and innovations in this area of practice. She produced a poster to illustrate her concern and ask for feedback from those attending the network event.



(Participants in dialogue at a poster)

After the Network event, Selina relayed to the group a conversation that she had with a secondary school teacher of English. The teacher had been intrigued with the connection between the development of gross and fine motor skills. She asked Selina how dancing could possibly encourage the development of fine motor skills such as those used in handwriting. Selina had assumed that all teachers had a basic understanding of children's developmental norms. She was thrilled to be able to share her knowledge with an interested colleague from outside the early years sector. What was particularly satisfying for Selina was the teacher indicated she would share her new understanding with her departmental colleagues, who were concerned with their students' often unintelligible handwriting. This might be the starting point for development work of their own.

This incident had a noticeable effect on Selina's confidence and self-efficacy. Having shared this important moment with the group she became increasingly more actively involved in discussions. I was aware that this incident was an important

influence on Selina's construction of her professional identity. Her comments below demonstrate how being accepted by peers, feeling that you belong and are valued are significant, affective aspects of professional identity (Sachs, 2003).

*I should feel and be more confident. I've got a good idea. Other people can see it too.*

(Selina, Tutorial notes, December 2015)

Selina's reflections hint at the importance of making connections throughout the development work process. Although each individual was invited to reflect on their values and identify what is of concern to them, key to the concept of extended professionalism is the development of a collegial focus. I planned to help participants consider the strategies and activities they might intentionally employ to develop reciprocal relationships between themselves and their colleagues and thus take their development projects forward.

### **Individuality and collectivity**

I have indicated the importance of participants self-selecting the focus for their development work. The dialogic tasks undertaken in the first sessions supported the clarification of an individual's own values and identity. This, and the subsequent agenda setting, was intended to mobilise the powerful force of an individual's moral purpose (Hill, 2014). The principle of ownership is a key lever for professional growth and educational change (Costa and Kallick, 2000) but, this does not presume isolation through the process of leading a development project. At an early stage in the programme participants were recognising this for themselves. They also demonstrated a keen awareness that there may be barriers to overcome. Selina, for example, was beginning to envisage the difficulties perhaps inherent in garnering support.

*I know it's important to work as a team to achieve the goals. Deciding who to approach is my first challenge.*

(Selina, Record of participation, October 2015)

Whilst Debbie's early reflection reflects the degree of urgency she sensed about this aspect for the initial stages of her prospective development work.

*Doing this project will give me a chance to lead even though I'm still only recently qualified. Working out ways to pull others onside with my project – I need to start this now.*

(Debbie, Record of participation, October 2015)

The professionalism I envisaged for the participants incorporates the collegial focus these participants were beginning to contemplate. Development work is the key vehicle for supporting the growth and enactment of an extended professionalism, but its success depends on colleagues' involvement and commitment (Middlewood, Parker and Beere, 2005). These endeavours necessarily involve consultation and collaboration with colleagues to realise the project's aims and fulfil participants expectations of the extent to which they are able to make a difference and effect improvements to practice. McDowall Clark and Murray (2012) name this 'diffused leadership,' a process that relates to collective engagement in the purpose, values and practices of a community.

But how might participants engage their colleagues to this end? Given the personalised nature of the foci for development, it might not be immediately obvious to participants' colleagues that the concern even fits with the setting's values or practices or priorities. My challenge was to help participants create opportunities to share their concern and convince others of its importance. Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003) endorse such possibilities for early years educators to act on their leadership potential. I was aware that although participants might attribute their motivation to their desire to make a difference, they might not appreciate how such action was 'leaderful.'

The third session sought to emphasise the power of collegiality and community building during the process of leading development work Frost (2017). I intended to use this session to broaden notions of leadership as a process of action and interaction between colleagues (Lambert, 2003). Participants from early years settings are accustomed to working within teams. Interdisciplinary work is common

in the sector, for example specialist teachers or speech and language therapists might regularly visit. Settings often have students on placements of varying lengths and parents and voluntary helpers are often on site. Nevertheless, the wider system of relationships in an early years setting are potentially reciprocal (Nivala and Hujala, 2002).

Once participants had an opportunity to share their own circumstances. I outlined the premise above. I asked the participants to consider the following.

- Who do I need to consult about my proposed project plan
- What should I say and do?
- What am I hoping to achieve?
- What will I do as a result?

In the third session participants seemed to recognise that a key factor in the success of their development work was obtaining the support of senior leaders. I mentioned the extent to which it might complement the priorities of the setting, thus increasing the likelihood of the change or improvement becoming embedded in the routines and culture of the setting (Harris and Bennett, 2001). I also remarked that they might be more willing to embark and persist with development work if they have access to nurturing colleagues who might express an interest and join the enterprise (Fleet and Patterson, 2009)

Discussion in the third session demonstrated that participants could see that their personal concerns might be easily aligned to the broad priorities held by their settings, identifying a colleague to approach who they expected would be initially supportive. I suggested using their action plans as a useful way of framing the discussion. Many consultations were extremely fruitful. Debbie made this written record of her meeting with the early years phase leader at her primary school setting.

*I spoke to Jenny about my initial ideas for my project. She was very supportive. We discussed how it will be a good fit with the Early Years Gold Standard Quality Mark Award we are working towards. I need to think carefully about how these can dovetail and ask if this is allowed.*



*She offered to lend me some books on outdoor learning. She also has made sure that I have time in the Early years Phase staff meetings to discuss my ideas and to gather ideas from the rest of the EY team. I need to decide what to ask my colleagues? What am I trying to work out first. How will I do it?*

(Debbie, Record of consultation, 21.10.15)

### **A developing community of learners**

The third session provided an opportunity for the participants to pool ideas about how they might attract ‘early adopters’ to join them; colleagues who have the courage to collaborate, innovate and show others the way (Sivers, 2010). Popular ideas involved hosting and inviting colleagues to a breakfast meeting, creating a bright, attractive noticeboard in the staff room to attract attention and requesting time during inset or meeting times to acquaint colleagues. Several participants reminded their peers of some of the tools I had introduced to them to aid reflection. These might be used or adopted to suit the context. The sharing of ideas and experiences in the structured dialogic activities undertaken in this session appeared to be contributing to participants enthusiasm for their project work. For some these opportunities for purposeful social interaction with like-minded peers were unusual. They appeared to be helping to breaking down the isolation some participants appeared to be experiencing in their settings, particularly those who worked in primary schools. The growing sense of community was enhancing their sense of professional worth.

*I overheard Wanda saying - people listen to you in the group and take what you say seriously.*

(Research journal, 12.11.15)

I could sense the group developing a collective sense of belief in their plans to make a difference to children’s learning. They were excited and energised by each other’s enthusiasm. Participants were engaging in mutual support, dialogue and reflection were becoming the expected way of communicating with each other. Such a shared ethos and social and professional bonds are features of an emerging community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

## **Facilitating the session**

I considered my facilitation of this third session. To some observers my input may have seemed minimal, but my planning before the session was essential for its success. I provided the provocations and tools to enable the discussion to happen. I structured the session and ensured that all participants had opportunities to speak to each other. I knew that this approach contrasted strongly with traditional transmission models of professional development. I refrained from using powerpoint slides as such an approach denies participants the opportunity to think through their own dilemmas and create their own solutions. I felt Colette's reflection on the session justified my belief that this type of facilitation not only valued participants' voices, but was aiding their reconceptualising of leadership.

*Talking through things in this session really helped me to think about my leadership and the way I communicate with others. This is important because wanting to make a change in a setting, requires everyone to be on the same page.*

(Colette, Record of participation)

Tutorials were carried out with all participants before the end of the Autumn term.

## **The initial tutorial**

These tutorials undertaken with each participant were not framed as traditional research interviews. Whilst they contributed greatly to my understanding about the ways in which practitioners were enacting their professionalism, and the effectiveness of the support offered to do this, they were far more mutually beneficial than a traditional research interview. I understood too well that those who teach can find the pace of work unrelenting. Such stressful circumstances often lead to them feeling as if they do not have time to engage in more than what is required for 'survival' (Kell, 2018). The tutorial was a deliberate strategy for providing participants some valuable protected time for professional reflection. Although the statutory framework for the early years (DfE, 2017) describes such supervisory opportunities as an entitlement for those in the sector, I was aware that very few

participants ever had the opportunity for supportive one-to-one conversations about their role and work, apart from annual appraisal interviews.

I bore in mind Denzin's (2001) observation that meetings which are largely conversational in nature yield the most useful information. However, the aim of this first tutorial was two-fold: to discuss the planning, progress and growing impact of the developing project and to gain feedback about the usefulness of the programme. Although I envisaged the meetings would be informal in tone, they still had to be effective in supporting participants in the early stages of their work. I therefore suggested to participants that they ought to prepare for the tutorial by considering three aspects of their experience so far, i.e. their views of the programme, the progress with their project work and the process of maintaining their portfolios. For each of these aspects I asked them to reflect:

- What is working well for you?
- What has been helpful so far?
- What challenges are you facing?
- How are you resolving them?
- What is becoming clearer?
- What remains unclear?

I provided light refreshments and conducted the tutorials in a quiet room, where we were unlikely to be disturbed. The participants appeared to relish an opportunity to be listened to. Each tutorial lasted around 40 minutes and most continued well past the allocated time. I made verbatim notes during each tutorial to create a record. I shared these with participants, checking for accuracy. The tutorial records were a source of evidence of participation and included in participants' portfolios. The excerpts in the following section draw on the text from the tutorial records. I identified the following themes as most significant.

### ***Experiences of the programme***

Participants' views of the programme were overwhelmingly positive. I had to be mindful that having worked hard at establishing trusting relationships with

participants, they may have been wary of causing me any upset. However, I considered Keely presented a very balanced view as recounted below.

*You said you're not really sure what you expected but enjoy the programme and its believe in its aims. We talked about the problems of trying to find a balance between home life and work. You feel that the programme is perhaps more intense than you had expected and that finding time to keep your portfolio is difficult. I tried to reassure you that long pieces of academic writing aren't necessary and that the portfolio is a means of documenting the work you are doing in your setting.*

(Keely, Tutorial record, 3.12.15)

Keely said she had never experienced a professional development opportunity quite like the 'Making a difference in the early years' programme. She appeared to be willing to accept the challenge but drew attention to the challenge of 'finding time.' Time, or lack of it, is described as an impediment to take on 'extra work' according to Muijs and Harris (2006:970). Further discussion with Keely convinced me though that she did not view her project as an additional burden. She was keen to point out how her focus for development was tapping into her personal enthusiasm and already impacting on the type and quality of learning experiences she was providing for children. Rather, I think her response was indicative of her adjusting to the approach to learning supported by the programme. It was obvious that she required some help finding practical strategies to use in the documentation process. However, utilising opportunities for deliberate reflection was perhaps a new experience and more difficult to accommodate into her thinking about her role. She described the programme in this way.

*...an opportunity to leave my safe zone. This has been my first real 'learning' opportunity in about 3 years.*

(Keely, Tutorial record, 2.12.15)

My advice to Keely was as follows:

*You say your observations seem to demonstrate that children need a 'sensory diet.' How do you know that? What exactly have you observed that indicates specific needs? E.g the little boy who appears to have missed out on 'tummy time.' I wonder how you have been or might record these observations? Have you shared these observations and what you think they mean with another colleague? I've found some interesting websites and a few articles online that*

*might help you decide where to go next and help demonstrate how important your work is.*

(Keely, Tutorial record, 2.12.15)

The questions I posed were intended to provoke Keely's thinking and depth of reflection. I recognised that Keely's reflections were descriptive in nature, akin to the first tier of Jay and Johnson's typology next.

<b>Descriptive</b>	What is happening? Is this working and for whom? How am I feeling? What do I not understand?
<b>Comparative</b>	How do other people explain what is happening? What do research and theory say? How can I improve?
<b>Critical</b>	Can I look at this from alternative perspectives? Given my own moral and ethical stance which solution is best for this particular issue? How does this reflective process inform and shape my perspective?

**Figure 7B.2:** Three tier classification of practitioner reflection  
(Jay and Johnson, 2002)

My suggestions were aimed at moving her from necessary, but somewhat solitary, introspection, to a position of greater criticality via an opportunity for consultation with her colleagues (Ghaye, 2000). Such conversations would help Keely to make sense and meaning of the moral and social values that underpinned her work, but also encourage dialogue with colleagues about pedagogical understandings. The provision of artefacts e.g. accessible journal articles and professional websites provided an alternative perspective for her to consider.

### ***Developing a collegial focus***

For some participants, engaging in discussions with other educators was initially unnerving. The language and concepts being used were new and one participant commented that she did not feel she had the 'words' or confidence to express their opinions to the whole group. She appreciated the opportunities to share her ideas and experiences in small groups or pairs. I noted in my research journal that at the beginning of the programme these pairings allowed participants to be open with one another and express their opinions freely. At this stage of the programme whilst

agreeing with Potter (2001) that conversation, debate, creative tension, questions and divergent perspectives all give rise to the enhanced thinking and new perspectives, I needed to be mindful of the needs of the group. I expected that confidence to speak out would grow as I provided further scaffolding for participants to think aloud with each other. Amanda's comment seemed to sum up the participants' experiences so far.

*I really enjoy being in the group...I feel like we are all on the same page.*

(Amanda, Tutorial notes, 2.12.15)

### ***An agential orientation***

The tutorials provided me with evidence of participants taking a more agentic mode in their work which they reported as being a result of engaging in the programme. Sally, a nursery school deputy headteacher noted

*In one session we talked about the challenges of working with others and the skills you need to do this...I had a lightbulb moment about how to handle a sometimes tricky relationship... it's so much better.*

(Sally, Tutorial notes, 8.12.15)

I noted in Colette's feedback the following:

*You said your ideas have shifted in the way you understand and go about working with parents because of the course. You are moving away from sending information out to them and putting a greater emphasis on building relationships through group/verbal interactions on-site.*

(Colette, Tutorial notes, 8.12.15)

This is particularly significant as her new approach echoes the constructivist approach I took to teaching and learning in the programme. I had purposely disrupted the usual knowledge/power relationships that exist and dominate approaches to professional learning in the early years to what seemed like good effect. In a similar way, problematising and seeking to change taken-for-granted practices was transformative for Colette in her work with parents and families.

### ***Moral purpose***

Participants' confidence in their moral purpose appeared to be driving them to share and hone their foci for development. Nadia, the manager of a community pre-school had recently been visited by an early years' advisor. The advisor's opinion was that the improvement of the teaching of mathematics should be a priority for the setting. The advisor maintained that this ought to be the focus of Nadia's development work. Nadia had confidently questioned this insistence from an external expert. In the tutorial she told me:

*I know my setting, the children and my team. It's going to be my decision. After much thought I decided to focus on interactions outside rather than embedding maths in the environment. Without quality interactions children's learning will not be developed – mathematical or otherwise.*

(Nadia, Tutorial notes, 2.12.15)

This exchange was a demonstration of extended professionalism. Nadia was able to resist the arguments from an external figure of power. She was able to justify her decision based on her understanding of her context and the judgements she had made of the needs of the children and her colleagues.

Instead of acquiescing to 'what is expected of me?' Nadia was proposing 'how can I create a learning environment suited to my circumstances?' Instead of pursuing a narrow focus that privileged a transmission approach to mathematical learning, she would be making choices grounded in her critical engagement with her context (Yelland and Kilderry, 2005).

### ***Providing leadership***

Participants' reflections demonstrated a developing sense that leadership was a human quality and might be exercised by anyone regardless of position. What was challenging for some was recognising what leaderful behaviour might entail. For example, Zoe was keen to involve her colleagues in developing an approach to storytelling. By this she meant both telling stories aloud with or without props but also the spontaneous stories that educators often devise in collaboration with children as they play together. She decided that she should commence her project with a meeting for her colleagues. She did was a little surprised about the costs incurred for

arranging a visiting ‘expert.’ During the tutorial I tried to help her see that she had the knowledge, skills and enthusiasm to lead the meeting herself and how this could usefully engage her colleagues.

*You are hoping to use an inset day with this as a focus. We talked about what the inset may involve. You might involve an external person but just think the session would be more powerful and persuasive for colleagues if you led it.*

(Zoe, tutorial record, 20.12.15)

For Zoe, arranging a day’s ‘training’ was construed as part of her leadership duties as deputy head teacher of a nursery. She found it difficult to understand that a collaborative enterprise to improve children’s learning might be ignited by her sharing her conviction about the importance of her focus (McDowall and Murray, 2012).

I encouraged several participants to broaden their views about what ‘counted’ as leadership. Some of this involved explaining that collaboration appears to be dependent on how successfully moral purpose is shared. It can only be shared if it is made explicit, if it is internalised by individuals and if its internalisation is widespread (Fleet and Patterson, 2009). I tried to convey this to Keely.

*Sensory play – what is it and why is it important for language development? What do you want to be happening? Once you have a clear definition of what it is and what it looks like it’ll be easier to influence/share ideas with colleagues.*

(Keely, Tutorial report, 2.12.15)

In a similar way, I suggested to Amanda some strategies for sharing her concern with her colleagues.

*How will you share this with your colleagues? Could you have a bit of a display board somewhere? Perhaps have a question on it and leave post-its for them to reply? Or some images of yoga in action...pictures or actual resources on a table... and ask them for ideas of why these things are important or could be used?*

*Will you be able to model an approach for your colleagues? Could you invite them to try out a lesson or watch you in action with the children?*

(Amanda, Tutorial report, 2.12.15)



I realised that I needed to support the participants to reconceptualise leadership. Many did not recognise the strategies for influencing and engaging colleagues that I described as ‘leaderful behaviour.’ Early challenges for some participants seemed unsurmountable. For example, one participant found that the school hall was booked for the time she had envisaged using it. I tried to encourage her to address the situation positively.

*We talked about some obstacles – the space and its availability, the size of group, the timing of the session. Who are you able to talk with about this? What positive alternatives could you suggest to them?*

(Amanda, Tutorial report, 2.12.15)

Other participants faced challenges due to the scale of their proposed projects.

*You’ve both gone through the process of realising that your original plans were perhaps too ambitious for a piece of development work and needed scaling down. Remember development work is a time bound, planned, strategic attempt to make a difference to practice/school community and ultimately children’s learning. Perhaps think your projects as nesting in the long-term vision for the nursery. Your projects as they are led by you will be making an impact little by little and contributing to this larger picture.*

(Sally and Selina, Joint tutorial record, 8.12.15)

Their moral purpose was incontrovertible, but they needed to appreciate the importance of taking small, incremental steps to expedite gradual improvements in practice, in a manageable way (Whalley, 2008).

In the final section of this chapter I summarise the action undertaken in this stage of my research. I also explain what I learned during this phase.

## **Chapter summary and emerging understandings**

This narrative chapter recounts the start of the programme and the activities undertaken by participants as they began to explore their identities and engage with the concepts and principles underlying of the programme. The chapter focuses on how I facilitated an environment of trust in order for participants to engage with the

first four steps of the TLDW model. Specific tools and structured discussions enabled participants to articulate their professional identities and the values they brought to their work. They identified their concerns and set about honing a focus for their development work. Dialogue within the wider network and with their own colleagues helped in the process of refinement.

The following is what I have learned from this stage. I draw attention to those aspects which appeared significant to me about the participants, the programme and my facilitation of it. My emerging understandings comprise insights, issues, challenges and principles that I carried with me into the next stage of the research.

A significant feature of the intervention was recognising that creating an environment for learning involved addressing physical, temporal and symbolic features. These all served to demonstrate how participants are valued in the process. I carefully attended to numerous practical details that would assist participants' comfort, put them at ease and provide opportunities for new relationships to flourish.

It was important that the choice of activities in the first session signalled the mode of learning and interaction that would pervade the programme. Structured tasks and activities stimulated individual reflection and fostered connections between group members, ensuring that relationships were built quickly. A developing professional learning community emerged because of these planned opportunities. Structured discussion provided the means for critical friendships to thrive. Dialogue stimulated deep reflection and reinforced active engagement with the TLDW process.

A significant insight was despite the differences between participants' roles, experience and work contexts, a commonality was the passionate care they brought to their work with young children and their families. This key aspect of professional identity was shared and recognised by each participant. Building in further opportunities to explore identity and make values explicit appeared a useful strategy in enabling participants to develop self-confidence but also foster a collaborative sense of resilience and collective efficacy. Whilst the facilitation of the programme

embraced individual development, it was only realisable within a deliberately structured group context.

Contrary to my expectations, the pedagogy of facilitation I provided was well received by participants. This might have been due to the similarities to the early years pedagogy employed by participants in their own work with young children. I was able to employ my skills at modelling and of observation, to help me nurture individuals appropriately but also to assist in my responsive planning for each session and the activities therein.

An interim challenge was the time required for and the pacing of the introduction of the key concepts and principles underpinning the programme. I realised that visiting and revisiting key messages would enable all participants to reconceptualise leadership and act on this understanding within the scope and limitations offered by their own context. This highlighted the prominence of the support required between sessions, in the tutorials and the preparation of participants to engage with networking opportunities outside of the school-based sessions.

An emerging insight was that the early stages of engagement with the programme appeared to help participants challenge the accepted discourse of professionalisation. This was important as many participants were accustomed to a transmission mode of professional development, one that did not require them to examine their own values and behaviour, nor initiate and plan for changes in their own and their colleagues' practice. An alternative way of thinking and being was considered during the first sessions.

In the next chapter I outline how the participants enacted an extended professionalism: putting their plans into action by beginning to lead their projects in their settings.

## **Chapter 7C**

### **Leading development work**

This chapter accounts for step 6 of the TLDW model. During a period of three months from January-March 2016 participants were leading their projects, drawing colleagues, children and families into collaborative processes. The narrative draws on a wide range of evidence from the fourth and fifth sessions and a tutorial to explore how they were enacting a more extended professionalism during the process. For many, their development work was enabling new practices to be trialled in their settings and collaborative relationships were flourishing. Confidence was high as participants were acting as change agents putting their plans into action. This demonstrated the extent to which they were understanding the programme concepts and features. Yet leading this work was not without its difficulties.

My facilitation played a key role in helping participants understand and cope with challenges and dilemmas in their work. The group sessions provided the time and space for dialogic activities that encouraged participants to analyse their own context for development work. The second tutorial offered me further insight into the nature of some of the problems participants were experiencing. These enabled me to provide a fifth session that provided a space for mutual support in the growing professional learning community. The facilitation I provided countered Fleet and Patterson's (2009:21) warning about 'possibilities that float into nothingness, halting starts and incomplete openings.'

Therefore, this chapter examines a crucial stage in the development of both the programme and its participants.

#### **Contexts for enacting professionalism**

The fourth session of the programme enabled participants to explore their developing understanding of leadership as a dimension of their extended professionalism. The

extent to which they were supported to do so in their settings varied. Some participants were meeting with challenges in their development work whereas others were not. Helping them to identify and share with each other the levers and challenges for the continued leadership and success of their own development work was a key piece of facilitation at this stage.

The influence of professional culture on the nature of teacher's professional learning is key (Sullivan, 2010). However, I could not take it for granted that the concept of institutional culture was part of the discourse in any of the participants' settings. In order to introduce the idea a collage activity was used. The activity involved participants using a variety of materials in the creation of ephemeral collages to represent leadership in their settings and consider how the leadership of their own projects fitted within this representation. Initially this was an individual activity. Then the whole group listened to each other as the collage's creator explained what they had made and how this represented their context for leadership. Participants were given an opportunity to respond to each other and to consider alternative experiences of the early years educator role (Flecher and Soler, 2014). The following themes arose from discussion the task provoked.

### ***Experiences of leading development work***

Violet's comments illustrate her perceived role in the leadership of her development work as she described what she had depicted in her collage. As a teaching assistant in a primary school foundation stage unit she particularly seemed to relish the opportunity to lead development that involved collaborative work with her colleagues.

*These are my teachers who I work with in my setting, the teachers and the TAs [teaching assistants], and they've all got their own ideas. They throw their ideas into the magical wind which moves up through this adventurous path and it gets here to me who mixes it all up and then has an explosion of an idea here and then it comes back down through my body here and it is whipped up into a circle, a bit like a wedding band, it never stops, and everything we have all thought comes together. Then I as the leader kind of do something with it.*

(Extract from commentary on Collage 1, by collage-maker, Violet)

Violet appears to be expressing a sense of responsibility for the leadership of the project and its impact. Another participant recognised this saying

*There's quite a lot of expectation on you because you are pulling all of this together.*

(Extract from commentary on Collage 1, by a participant)

### **Collegiality**

The collage making activity indicated the degree to which the group was developing a strong team identity. Amanda indicates how mutual support from the group was assisting her in developing new ways of supporting children's learning.

*So although my project was yoga it came from listening to what other people were saying about children's attention being lower... so sometimes the ideas don't just come from me they come from lots of other things.*

(Research journal, January, 2016)

Listening to and building on the ideas of others strengthens the potential impact of a teacher-led development work project. It also provides an opportunity share difficulties and triumphs as noted by Wanda.

*We can discuss the pros and cons of an idea, whether its good, bad, ways we can change it and then bringing it all into flower, into fruition.*

(Wanda, reflection on collage activity, January, 2016)

The language used by participants in the exchanges about the collages was particularly supportive. These questions enabled extended discussions to take place. They gently probed each other's assumptions and observations and ensured that alternative perspectives were resented and contemplated.

*If individuals have the confidence to lead and take the initiative themselves then you wouldn't have so many people to be leading. I think that is kind of the modern way of thinking about schools. No longer do you want to be telling people what to do but you want other people to tell you what they would like to do, and that is leadership within yourself. All those people you are managing...you are showing leadership skills but it doesn't seem that*

*they are developing their own and that seems a bit unfair, for you, for the people who aren't developing themselves.*

(Extract from commentary on Collage 5, by a participant)

The participants comments are then representative of their membership of a new group, developing shared social and cultural values. The process of socialisation was impacting on their professional identities. They were now beginning to see themselves as a certain type of professional, one who takes a particularly agentic approach to improving outcomes for young children and their families.

### ***Agential orientation***

Participation in the programme and membership of the group appeared to be supporting the development of more robust professional identities for some of the participants. This is a reminder of Biesta's (2009) concept of subjectification, the importance of developing as an individual within the communities one belongs to.

Violet remarked on the usefulness of this activity noting it

*...gave me an insight into myself, how I saw leadership, and now I've actually been questioning it in my setting...questioning what the meaning of leadership is. It also gave me an insight into how all the others in the group were handling leadership...*

(Violet, Record of participation, January 2016)

From being 'just a TA in a school' who was 'sent' on the programme, Violet was successfully envisaging and negotiating a new role and identity for herself based on her interpretation of the 'atelierista' employed in Reggio nurseries. For Violet, the programme and opportunities to engage in reflection and dialogue such as this seemed crucial in liberating her understanding of leadership away from dominant interpretations and enabled personal transformation to occur (Western, 2008).

Violet's identity and her status were both shifting. Emanuel Levinas asserts that 'being there' usurps someone else's place in the world (Ricoeur and Escobar, 2004). This sense of pushing others aside does not feature in the discussions. It does not resonate with the inclusive principle of non-positional leadership the programme

encompasses, nor does it pervade the way in which many of the participants' setting functions.

*There are leaders at every different level and different staff are there with their different roles and responsibilities so it interlinks but we have a leader headteacher, who drives the centre and drives the school forward but everybody's part of it.*

(Extract from commentary on Collage 7, by collage-maker, Sally)

Co-leadership appears to be a growing dimension of participants sense of professional identity. Debbie offers an interesting insight in to her view about the boundaries and purpose of leadership.

*The biggest impact that other people in the school have been able to see from my work is the leadership we have given to our children in our outdoor area ... We have children who lead ... it started with our forest school and it has filtered out to different things.*

(Extract from commentary on Collage 3, by collage-maker, Debbie)

Debbie viewed children's leadership as fundamental to the success of her development work. Her approach involved facilitating young learners' abilities to be agentic in their own learning. This is dependent on having access to enabling environments and adults who are sensitive to their needs and interests (Fisher, Godwin and Seltman, 2014). Participants were able to recognise the similarities between early years pedagogy and the support they were receiving to help them exercise leadership as a dimension of extended professionalism.

### ***Collaborative working***

In a similar way, participants were developing connections and initiating collaborations with their colleagues in their settings to develop practices which were owned by all. Violet viewed herself as central to this process as she enacted her newly extended professionalism.

*I'm supposed to be the leader so I'm listening to all of the ideas and then regurgitate it out in a way that everybody is happy with.*

(Extract from commentary on Collage 1, by collage-maker, Violet)

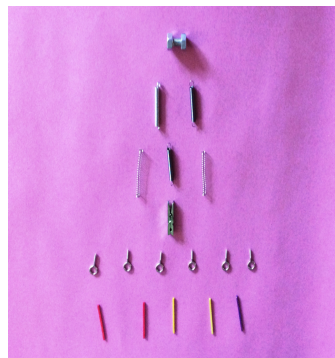


Violet's commitment to making collaborative approaches work is profound, as is the sense of responsibility she feels about reaching a consensus about strategies to support children's learning. The complexity of leadership work is increased due to the multiple agendas with which she must contend.

*I am the one who is trying to find out what my Early Years Manager wants, my teacher wants, the children want and come up with something which suits everyone and is also child initiated so watching what the children are interested in, so it is down to me to make it work because that's my role.*

(Extract from commentary on Collage 1, by collage-maker, Violet)

Zoe's collage depicts a very different experience. Her collage is strikingly different in both its form but also the materials she chose to create it.



(Photograph of Collage 5, by Zoe)

She told a story of a very different working environment.

*Leadership in my setting is absolutely hierarchical. This is the head, senior leader and Senco. This is me. And this peg represents me trying to hold the TAs up. I think leadership should be bottom up, top down and side by side, but it isn't.*

(Extract from commentary on Collage 5, by collage-maker, Zoe)

Zoe continued to express how debilitating the conditions in her setting were. Her headteacher had, she said, 'sent' her on the programme. Zoe had started to focus on developing her concern about storytelling and the development of children's oracy, but unexpectedly she found herself thwarted by the headteacher. Zoe was understandably feeling unsupported, but the situation was exacerbated as her

colleagues, the TAs, had recognised that Zoe's ideas and decisions had been overturned. Zoe felt embarrassed and depreciated. Shortly after the session I learned that Zoe had left her setting. She did not return to any of the programme meetings, nor did she respond to my efforts to communicate with her.

### ***Supportive conditions***

It was difficult to ascertain exactly what had caused Zoe to leave her job and the programme. It might well have been that the principles underlying the programme had proved too challenging for the relationship with her headteacher. I felt concerned that I might have been able to rescue the situation had I known the difficulties Zoe had been facing. Karis, reassured me that the situation was complex but nevertheless I was sorry to lose a participant. Her comments about the relationships in her setting are revealing.

*Schools are very much a business nowadays and you've got to have that strong leader. But sometimes I find that these here (TAs) need more of a voice, more of an input and to have that recognised whether it is good or whether it is bad. All the cogs need to be working because sometimes you can get the cogs working here and if it is not a two-way process sometimes these cogs stop working and you start getting a little bit of jittery.*

(Extract from commentary on Collage 5, by collage-maker Zoe)

Other senior leaders demonstrated those requirements clarified by Mylles (2017) to support any participants engaging with the programme: trust, humility and advocacy. Some senior leaders trusted prospective participants to choose a focus for practice development. Selina recognises this as she commented on Christine's collage.

*I like how you go off as well, have your own ideas, to be independent about the way you teach. You are not expected to be teaching everything in the same way. You are individuals and your head is almost celebrating that.*

(Extract from commentary on Collage 8, by participant, Selina)

Others were able to relinquish the traditional construct of leadership associated with status, power and position and create a culture in which non-positional leadership might flourish. Keely explained her headteacher explicitly encouraged her to engage with teacher-led development work.

*The head was very keen for me to come on this and lead these colleagues.*

(Extract from commentary on Collage 9, by collage-maker, Keely)

Selina's headteacher offered her personal support and encouragement to enrol.

*I think sometimes we are dragged kicking and we think, it is not for me, it is not for me, but sometimes our head has the vision and she is like, you can do it. And sometimes within myself there can be resistance, I think, oh, I don't know if I can do this.*

(Extract from commentary on Collage 5 by Selina)

Another participant recognised her headteacher was purposely seeking to employ non-positional leadership throughout the setting.

*My headteacher sent me here because she does want it to be planted and she does want TAs to lead.*

(Extract from commentary on Collage 5 by Violet)

Violet was extremely positive about the leadership in her setting and about the sense of agency which teacher-led development work had fostered in her. The word 'sent' is interesting, particularly since the headteacher told me herself that she would be 'sending' a teaching assistant on the programme. Despite advocacy for her colleagues to enact extended professionalism the headteacher still acted from a position of power to send colleagues on development programmes rather than asking them to attend.

### ***Equality as a driver***

The structure and facilitation of the programme is underpinned by my own commitment to equality. I recognised that early years educators, no matter their role or status or working context would benefit from opportunities to make connections, to experience being valued and to be enabled to make a difference to educational and life outcomes for young children. The professionalism I envisaged for them and the vehicle of a programme teacher-led development work to achieve it, are similarly underpinned by a belief that leadership capacity is a characteristic of all human beings (Hill, 2014). A wide variety of roles and experience were represented in the

group. Participants reported that they worked together effectively in this group, supporting one another to achieve their individual goals, recognising a shared sense of moral purpose. However, this was not the experience of all participants in their settings. Valuing of more hierarchical leadership structures might distort this.

*Other people in the school from other phases just see the teachers as the leaders. And they say things to us like, why do your TAs come to phase meetings, ours don't'... or why are your TAs here on INSET days? They do still see that teachers are the leaders but actually in the early years (department) we've got leadership running all the way through and it goes up and down...*

(Extract from commentary on Collage 3, by collage-maker, Selina)

One participant offering an interesting thought about how the equity of the group ought to be mirrored in settings. A discussion around Collage 4 included an interesting comment on how this equity of value should be mirrored in settings.

*I feel in a nursery setting you go in and you shouldn't be able to tell one role from another because everybody is working together for the same end.*

(Comment on Collage 4, by Christine)

Other participants concurred with the hierarchy of role-based value in settings, whilst recognising the emancipatory power of learning.

*I think that is really interesting because the only reason my headteacher sent me here is because they say they value their TAs and they no longer want to see them at the bottom. They want us to become leaders and to use initiative and to drive things forward ourselves.*

(Comment on Collage 5, by Selina)

### **Challenges of leading development work**

Supervisions demonstrated that all participants had managed to hone a focus for concern. Having an artefact in the form of a project plan was a useful tool in engaging colleagues. Some participants had begun to annotate this plan in the light of feedback from their colleagues. Those who had presented a poster at the previous Network Event seemed particularly inspired. All participants had begun to engage

with leading their development work, with some making greater progress than others.

This was extremely positive but a range of issues needed to be addressed. The supervisions revealed that some participants faced barriers at this early stage. Individual coaching was useful in facilitating participants' understanding of how they might best address these, but for some these challenges were negatively impacting their burgeoning professionalism. I wanted to ensure that all participants became aware that having a commitment to an end or goal, or even a shared moral purpose within a setting, does not mean that obstacles would not be encountered (Bezzina, 2007). I wanted to help them accept disequilibrium as an inevitable component of the process (Fleet and Patterson, 2009) with reflecting on these situations and putting strategies into place to overcome them being components of leadership work.

My reflections helped me plan the fourth session, which I entitled 'Meeting the leadership challenge.' This session involved my facilitating tasks encouraging participants to share the obstacles and challenges they were facing. I used a very visual approach which stimulates creativity and problem-solving (Jarvis and Graham, 2015). I had reviewed their concerns and felt these tended to be concerned with:

- personal capacity e.g. attitude or belief about one's capacity to lead change
- professional roles e.g. being held back by one's own or someone else's view about role or status
- organisational structure e.g. how the culture of the setting – it's routines and norms might be holding one back from acting

I named these challenges 'locks.' I gave the participants time to reflect on the challenges they were facing and consider whether they related to these 'locks.' The challenges were not shared aloud but participants were encouraged to write their challenges on the appropriate poster. When this was complete I invited participants to suggest 'keys' to these problems. This was an opportunity to support each other and share their combined experiences to suggest possible solutions for each other.

Time was then spent on individual reflection. Photographs of the locks and keys posters were later circulated to the group. The posters were added to the classroom walls at each subsequent meeting.



(Locks and keys activity, Session 4, January 2016)

### **A learning community**

The group continued to demonstrate some of the features of a learning community (Wenger, 1998). Disclosing such challenges and hearing their colleagues had similar experiences appeared to bring some relief to participants. One participant reflected

*This has been such a valuable session, talking and sharing with others is so useful. Just to know they have encountered similar difficulties.*

(Wanda, Record of participation 21.1.16)

The act of admitting to facing difficulties might have felt hazardous for participants, but it appeared that, rather than exposing or embarrassing individuals, it fostered the social connections that were developing amongst the group. Such a climate of trust is indicative of a developing professional learning community (Stoll et al, 2005). It also allows dormant reciprocal capacities in educators to be released (Katzanmeyer and Moller, 1996). Certainly, participants were generous with their ideas and support for one another.

*Lock: I am lacking in confidence to make decisions.*

*Key: Reflective practice would help. Imagine making a decision. Project ahead what's the worse thing that could happen? Start to problem solve now consider what might go wrong and how you could react or do something differently.*

*Lock: I worry about my status. I do not feel confident about leading a session for my colleagues, but I know that is what I have to do.*

*Key: Think of the best events you have been to. Why were they effective? Can you use similar ideas, strategies or activities for yours?*

(Comments made on tool in session, 21.1.16)

Such examples echo the constructivist approach employed in the programme and hark to the enabling interactions between children and adults identified by Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2004), the sustained, shared thinking which occurs when two or more individuals ‘work together’ in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate an activity or extend a narrative. Reflections from participants perhaps revealed how structured group dialogue might enable and reinforce mutual understanding and learning (Fink and Markholt, 2011).

*I discovered how much I valued other members opinions and ideas and know how these will help me move my development project forward. I have a much better idea of what I'd like to achieve and hoe to go about it.*

(Debbie, Record of participation 21.1.16)

Such an opportunity appeared to help participants recognise themselves as professional resources for each other

*It made me think about leadership in general. I don't know all the answers but there's often someone who does.*

(Sally, Record of participation 21.1.16)

Conversely one participant indicated an increased sense of confidence as a result of sharing her expertise and experiences. Having drawn on and made her tacit knowledge overt she was more prepared to do the following in her own workplace.

*Next steps: Share my skill set, share my passion, inspire others, motivate, support and use my voice.*

(Violet, Record of participation 21.1.16)

## **Solving problems**

The locks and keys activity exemplified facilitation based on connecting with and responding to participants' current needs. Participants were given opportunity to support one another instead of seeking solutions provided by outside experts. The 'buddy group' approach (Wenger, 1998) led to active engagement in issues of immediate concern, supporting individual agency and challenging hierarchies associated with traditional professional development models. It is in direct contrast to the transmission-oriented professional development programmes in which information is fed to participants through a 'conduit' in the form of a 'rhetoric of conclusions' (Connelly and Clandinin, 1995). A participants' 'lightbulb' moment might not have occurred had she left alone to reflect on the challenges she was experiencing 'teachers need to have conversations with their peers to engage in conversations where problems are shared, reflected back, heard afresh and relived in new and different ways (Connelly and Clandinin, 1999). The opportunity was not purely reflective. Engaging in dialogue and reflections to find useful solutions to problems can lead to purposeful action for participants (Soler and Flecha, 2014). Janet was one of many who reflected after the session that

*It's helped me think of practical things I can do straight away.*

(Janet, Record of participation 21.1.16)

Relational interdependence was a growing feature of the group. The deliberate sharing of power helped to build up 'catalytic agency' (MacDowall Clark and Murray, 2013). Such a contagion might not only be transformative for participants, enhancing their professional identity and enabling them to enact an extended professionalism, but has the potential for local sector impact as these participants draw their colleagues and organisations into the leadership of their development work.

## ***Recognising leadership***

Some participants still appeared to difficulty in thinking of themselves as leaders or identifying their actions as leaderful behaviour. One participant had managed to make excellent progress with her development work. I invited her to tell the story of



her work so far with the group. For me this was a strength-based approach to helping participants move forward with their own work (Blaise, 2009). Instead of a ‘deliverer’ of professional development pointing out what participants needed to do or think, a peer presented the unfolding story of her leadership. The story was purposely shaped to highlight those leaderful behaviours which participants were ready to incorporate develop in their own work.

I reasoned that hearing her story would benefit the group by highlighting:

- how a personal focus was linked with setting’s priorities
- how collaboration might be approached
- an honest account of the challenges so far and how she had confronted them
- a demonstration of the impact the process was already having on children, colleagues and herself

I asked the participant to use a simple proforma relating to each of these to help structure what she presented to the group. In order to help colleagues consider these aspects of the story I provided a similar recording system for small groups on a large sheet of paper.



(Photograph of the tool used in session)

Whilst they were listening they noted down anything important that they heard. After the participant had told her story each small group had an opportunity to share with each other what they had noticed and add to the sheet. Each group then elected a spokesperson who fed back three key observations to the whole group.

Participants were able to discriminate many of the key examples of the aspects. One trio noticed how the focus of developing a 'Forest school' approach was rooted in their colleague's own enthusiasm for outdoor learning, but also that she had intentionally focussed on particular learners, a group of 8 children with language and behavioural difficulties, as she introduced the approach to the school. In doing so the participant was successfully making use of her small-scale development work to address a whole school priority. She had also acted quickly and confidently to ask the head teacher for some time in one of the regular whole school staff meetings, in order to share her focus and her action plan with her colleagues. She had also requested their help in resourcing the outdoor environment. Colleagues were happy to bring in resources from home or items they found in their classrooms. This was described as a 'no-risk' involvement by a member of the group as it did not contribute to colleague workload. It was acknowledged that this small step might lead to deeper collaboration with colleagues. The participant involved children's parents, inviting them to come along to one of the outdoor sessions with their children and enjoy some roasted marshmallows. She was disappointed that only two parents joined them. Undeterred, she set about arranging other opportunities. She also followed a colleague's suggestion to send photographs home with the children to help parents understand the experiences she was providing for their children. The participant came across some information about short workshop, exploring Forest school activities, that she attended one Saturday morning. Participants recognised how this input enriched her thinking about the possibilities for teaching and learning she might offer children. Despite recognising these actions as important, participants found it more difficult to pinpoint how the story demonstrated leadership. The only suggestion was that she 'led' part of a staff meeting.

I used these comments as an opportunity to help broaden participants understanding about the nature of leadership by focussing on the behaviours that their colleague had undertaken. She had for example:

- observed a need
- taken the initiative
- taken a risk

- looked for alternatives
- acted on advice
- influenced others.

By working in this way, she was enacting an extended professionalism. The participant has a quiet and unassuming manner, was a part-time teacher and had no formal position of power. The behaviours she had exercised were not due to her status, nor had they been carried out in a forceful or flamboyant manner. These were examples of leaderful behaviour which everyone might practise.

### **Accounting for our stories of development**

As explained previously, TLDW participants are required to build and submit a portfolio to demonstrate evidence of both participation in the programme and leadership of development work in their institutions. Advice is to collate evidence throughout the year, then to select key items to present in the portfolio for assessment. I thought there was a possibility that asking my early years participants to do this might give the impression that the portfolio was merely a product; a course requirement to satisfy an assessment procedure. Although the advice was to label evidence included and provide a connective and reflective narrative between items, the previously completed portfolios I had read seemed to leave much untold (Orland-Barak, 2005). I wanted to avoid participants creating documents that offered purely technical descriptions of activity undertaken. Rather I planned for them to be a method of capturing participants' reflections about and growing understanding of the ways in which they are enacting professionalism through the leadership of development work.

Reflection is considered an important facet of professionalism in early years education (Duhn et al., 2008; Urban, 2008). Consensus over the meaning of the term is lacking. Some, such as Cheng (2001) distinguish between reflection-for-action (what will I do?); reflection-in-action (what am I doing?) and reflection-on-action (what have I done?). However, the dominant concept within guidance for the sector,

appears to be about ‘doing things right.’ Guidance from PACEY (2016), a early years sector professional association emphasises how engaging in reflective processes will help identify

What worked well? How and why did it work?’ and What didn’t work and why? This can translate into improvements for your setting, making you more efficient, enhancing your reputation, enabling you to evidence outcomes more clearly, and therefore provide evidence for Ofsted and your Self Evaluation Form.

(PACEY, 2016)

The focus here is on routine practice and accountability. Antithetical to this is reflection on ‘doing the right thing’ (Coussee, Bradt, Roose and Bouverne-De Bie, 2010) which involves educators employing a more reflexive turn. Acquiring technical expertise is necessary, but learning to be a reflective practitioner involves engaging in dynamic professional relationships, connecting theory and practice, and providing a rationale for action (Orland-Barak, 2005). Having support to question taken-for-granted beliefs and practice and being helped to understand that knowledge is contestable might mean that educators would be in a better position to expand their conceptualisations of their role and work with young children. This is more akin to *phronesis*, something which demands skill, character development and openness to confronting the particularities of a context or situation (Benner, 1984). This type of reflection has much in common with the enactment of extended professionalism. Schon (1983) and Kemmis (1985) conceptualise such practice as systematic, rigorous and disciplined; one which makes use of communal meaning making. The stance is both affective and intellectual (Eisner and Powell, 2002) integrating ethical, critical and transformational dimensions of practice development (Van Manen, 1991). Diaries, journals and portfolios have been used as a method of making such reflective processes explicit. However, I did not take it for granted that the portfolio would automatically constitute an effective way of enhancing or eliciting the type of reflection I have described. I still sensed that documenting one’s learning might be challenging and participants would require my support.

Several email exchanges had made me aware that some participants were seeking confirmation that they were including appropriate items in their developing portfolios. I also suspected that some participants had been active in driving their

development work forward and participating in the programme but might not have included evidence of the process in their portfolios. I wondered whether their trepidation was indicative of a tendency to modesty or perhaps reflected the behaviour of individuals used to functioning under a ‘regulatory gaze’ (Ball, 2012). I was determined that the portfolios and the process of evidencing their work should contribute to participants viewing themselves as capable and competent learners.

I designed the fifth session in February to help participants review the extent to which successfully documenting the processes of leading development work. It was also important to help them recognise and gauge the kind of impact the project having so far. I had asked participants to bring some examples of evidence with them. In a previous session we had discussed ‘what counts’ as evidence. As participant were acquainted with documenting children’s learning in a similar way. They seemed to understand readily that this evidence might include a variety of items including, but not limited to, the following (Frost, 2008).

*Consultation*

Sounding out, asking advice, seeking permission, reassuring, testing out ideas, finding out what has happened before, establishing trust

*Discussion*

Clarification of the problem, identifying the issues, reviewing practice, joint planning, agreeing priorities, exploring other’s understandings, interpreting data

*Training*

Running a workshop, coaching, mutual observation, distributing guidelines etc

*Reading*

Searching for accounts of similar projects, exploring the research literature, looking up government advice

*Information gathering*

Observing, interviewing, multiple diaries, focus groups, listening to or observing children, group activities, analysing pupils’ work, reviewing documentation, auditing, surveying

*Networking*

Visiting other schools or settings, contacting others you have met at events, online communities

*Joint work*

Planning in a team, making materials together, designing a data gathering exercise etc

*Trialling*

new teaching and learning strategies  
Trying a new classroom activity, experimenting with a new teaching technique, etc

In order to clarify and support their thinking I provided some examples of evidence collated by a member of the group. These included an annotated action plan, reflections on presenting a poster at a network event, annotated photographs of children engaged in an activity and a collection of evaluative comments from

colleagues. In pairs and trios, I asked colleagues to consider each piece of evidence and discuss:

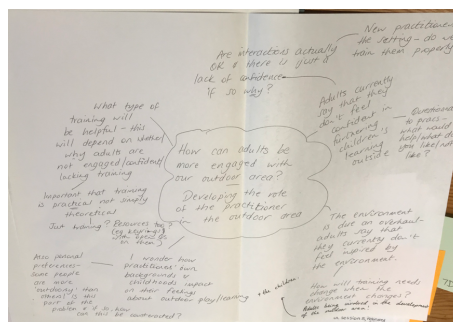
- What is the piece of evidence?
- How or why it was produced?
- What does it demonstrate?
- Why is it of significance?
- How it might be annotated to show its significance?



(Reviewing evidence, Session 5, February 2016)

These questions acted as scaffolding directing participants to both the enactment of extended professionalism and how the process of leading development work might be contributing to teaching and learning. Once participants had discussed these examples. I asked them to turn their attention to their own pieces of evidence and to ask the same questions of themselves. This scaffolding helped each participant enhance their capacity for reflection. Some shared their thinking with the group.

Debbie shared the following piece of evidence.



(Debbie's thought shower about the focus of her development work, Session 5, February 2016)

Her written reflection included:

*This was my initial thought showering about my potential concern after the first tutorial. At the time I was excited about the possibilities ahead. I felt buoyed by my early experiences of the programme meetings. I was keen to start but a bit overwhelmed with everything I wanted to achieve. It demonstrates just how broad my thinking was at the beginning of the process. I was and am determined to make a success of my project. I had so many ideas but then had difficulty knowing where to start. I learnt a lesson about leadership – from small acorns grow mighty oaks – you don't have to start with big ideas. In fact, it's better to start with something achievable and grow from there. After I shared my ideas with a colleague it really helped me to find a starting point and make sense of what I wanted to achieve.*

Debbie's reflection is far from simplistic. She demonstrates her awareness of the need to articulate her concern, clarify the rationale and the value of having an interested colleague at the early stages of planning a development project.

Inviting participants to return to their action plan is one way of beginning reflection on impact. On their action plans they will have noted the impact they hope their project will have. This may well have shifted in the light of development activity and plans can be adjusted accordingly. The action plan is of course a working document and evidence of reflection and leadership can be added at different times to show how the journey of development has unfolded. This may be, for example, in the form of post-it notes attached to the plan.

In the final section of this chapter I summarise the action undertaken in this stage of my research. I also explain what I learned during this phase.

### **Chapter summary and emerging understandings**

This chapter examines a crucial stage in the development of the programme and its participants. The educators were leading their projects, drawing colleagues, children and families into collaborative processes. Many of the participants flourished during the process but it was not without its challenges. Both my facilitation and the mutual support participants gave each other were key to facing and overcoming these obstacles. The following is what I have learned from this stage. My emerging

understandings comprise insights, issues, challenges and principles that I carried with me into the next stage of the research.

Tools and discussion supported participants analysing their specific contexts for development enabled deep reflection and supported problem-solving both individually and collectively. Artefacts also provided an evaluative tool, reminding participants of their vision for developed practice, annotated and amended throughout the process. However, a key insight is that the type and quality of facilitation supports the degree to which this is possible.

Deliberate facilitation ensured that the group developed into a professional learning community. Members provided reassurance and critical feedback for each other. This demonstrates that relational interdependence and mutuality could be fostered in a multi-setting group comprised of those in differing roles, experiences and background. An inclusive approach meant that views and advice were valued by all. However, this was not mirrored in every setting represented.

Varying degrees of support for participants from their settings remained a crucial variable. Although a newly extended professionalism was being enacted by many participants, a lack of encouragement from senior leaders was presenting at least one participant with difficulties. This accentuated the need for support for leadership beyond that which I could provide in the sessions, and from other participants in the network. I realised this would be difficult to resolve in a multi setting group.

A challenge was that some participants did not seem to characterise their action as leadership. The focus of my facilitation at this point was helping participants recognise and name the leaderful behaviour they were engaging with. I needed to be creative with the ways in which I managed this and careful not to slip into a telling or transmission mode of teaching. Using participants own stories and portfolios that were in construction proved a turning point. These helped participants understand the concept more thoroughly but also imbued them with confidence that teacher leadership was achievable. I found too that participants had an increased



understanding of the significant evidence they should include in their portfolios to demonstrate their impactful actions in their settings.

## **Chapter 7D**

### **Knowledge building**

This covers a tutorial, another network event, final session, Annual Conference and the hand-in session and evaluation which took place between April – June 2016. Enacting extended professionalism involves creating and building professional knowledge (Sachs, 2003; Frost, 2012). Professional knowledge is multi-faceted and includes:

- knowing what to teach
- knowing how to create the conditions that enable students to learn
- knowing how to assess students' learning
- knowing how to teach
- knowing how students learn and what prevents them from learning
- knowing how to respond to opportunities and problems as they arise

The assumption I make throughout this process is that the participants would individually and collectively create professional knowledge through the process of leading development work. It would also manifest itself throughout and within the dialogue in the sessions being supported and provoked by the tasks and activities. During the sessions the participants have had opportunity to present and represent parts of their stories, incidents, struggles and triumphs. Although they have exchanged information and tips and made recommendations of a practical nature to each other, what they have also done is invoke a moral response from their colleagues, inspiring each other and helping each other wonder about future possibilities for their own work and lives (Frost, 2014). Hope such as this, Freire (1994) argues, is an ontological necessity. A participant alludes to this here.

*I have been inspired and encouraged by hearing a powerful story about an ordinary teacher leading change in a school. It has really inspired me to believe that I can make a difference and that my project will have an effect hopefully not just in my immediate phase but across the school.*

(Debbie, Record of participation, January 2016)

This way of being is what I envisaged for the early years educators who inspired me to take first take action. This was not a vain hope. I realised the programme appeared to be enabling participants to enact a more extended professionalism. Participants were using, generating and building knowledge about how to design, manage and lead a process of change and improvement - or development - that extends types of technical professional knowledge outlined above. The final chapter in this narrative section gives further examples of how the realistic and strategic support from the programme has helped participants feel valued, make connections and most importantly make a difference in their work with young children and their families. I draw on the second and final tutorial and the final session to illustrate examples of this.

### **Evaluating impact of development work**

I intended that the second tutorial would help participants to focus on the growing impact of their project work and also to visualise and make plans for its wider effect. A discussion about the extent to which they were managing this has to be set in context. The early years stage of education has seen increased accountability in the past 10 years. This is an important consideration as the way in which impact is conceptualised in the HertsCam Network, and the ways in which it may be planned for and evaluated, might be alien to many of the participants.

Current policy construes impact in narrow terms and has normalised approaches to assessing young children's progress. Statutory assessment at the end of the Reception year includes 17 different judgements, with an increased focus on attainment in mathematics and English and higher expectations for the benchmark measure of success, known as reaching 'good levels of development.' For early years educators demonstrating the effect of their work with young children is a continual challenge. Participants report the constant pressure to complete 'trackers' and demonstrate constant and uninterrupted progress for children. The monitoring and mining of this data, and the examination of comparative data sets for settings

with similar cohorts, is time consuming and unwieldy, but also a perhaps grudgingly accepted part of the participants' workloads.

These ways of working demand that participants adopt a 'technical professionalism' (Ball et al., 2012) with an accompanying replacing of what is important with what is necessary (Nickel and Lowe, 2010). The outcome of these accountability measures is an increased production, analysis and comparison of what Selwyn et al. (2015) characterise as 'compliance data' and a depreciating of 'useful data,' such as narrative and formative assessments based on observations of children in playful learning situations. My exploratory study revealed the extent to which this was affecting a small number of educators. They agreed that a relentless focus on testing and assessing young children appears to be eroding appropriate pedagogy that focuses on young children's needs and a devaluing of play-based approaches to learning in favour of transmission approaches.

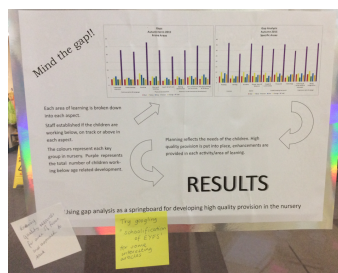
In contrast, an extended professionalism (Sachs, 2003) is supported by the work of the HertsCam Network. Teacher leadership is seen to be a key strategy for mobilising the moral purpose of teachers. The development projects they lead improve and develop aspects of professional practice which impact on the quality of children's learning (Eltemany, 2017; Ramahi, 2017), but also the ripples of this impact are discerned more widely.

I approached the tutorial understanding that for many participants this was the first time they had been involved in a process that had the potential to make a difference beyond their own classrooms. Not only that, but 'useful data,' of the type described by Robert-Holmes and Bradbury (2006), is what I had encouraged participants to collate to show evidence this impact.

The review of their development work began with my asking participants to tell me about the impact they thought they had had so far and the types of evidence they had to support this. All the participants indicated that children and colleagues had been drawn into and were benefitting from the development work. The examples they gave indicated that their development work was not an isolated classroom-based

project. Even those projects which had begun with a participant's concern about particular children in their key groups, or desire to develop their own teaching strategies, had expanded in scope. Some of these stories demonstrating a process of leadership: of consultation, collaboration and experimentation which enabled others to develop practice, are told later in this chapter.

One participant's evaluation of the impact of her work particularly struck me. It demonstrated an interesting relationship between the 'compliance' and 'useful' data described earlier. It also highlights the developing leadership capacity of someone in a positional role. Colette was a deputy headteacher who leads a team of 9 practitioners in a nursery school with a capacity of 90-100 children. The excerpt below is based on her written reflections from her Portfolio.



*This photograph shows the poster I presented at the network event. In some ways I wanted to show other teachers that we in the Early Years also have to deal with data. I have the impression they think we don't. At my setting we use gap analysis data as a springboard for developing high quality provision in the nursery. Our priority is to identify the strengths and needs of the current cohort using this analysis, including high achieving children and those receiving early years pupil premium funding.*

*To begin with I thought I would change the child-initiated provision throughout the Nursery and to adapt the planning we currently use for small group time. I talked through my ideas at the TLDW sessions and collaborated with colleagues both in the group and in school. I realised that my project was too large with no particular focus and only involved me taking action.*

*After speaking with a colleague who had a real enthusiasm for food technology I realised that something as simple as a cookery club would have an enormous impact for all children. Together we planned a series of simple cooking activities to be led by adults over a number of weeks. These included simple pictorial instructions. Children have enthusiastically participated. Following the adult-led activity, the resources are left available for children to use when they want. I overheard one child with speech and language*

*guiding one of his peers to make a milkshake. He had never interacted in this way before. Parents have become interested and one or two have shared recipe ideas with us. I'm looking forward to seeing what happens next.*

(Colette, Portfolio reflection, April, 2016)

The programme was designed to support non-positional leadership in which any educator regardless of status or position might be supported to enact an extended professionalism by carrying out strategic action aimed at developing professional practice. There may seem to be an anomaly here as Colette had a formal leadership position, but her reflection is important. It demonstrates how as a leader she is accountable for improving the quality of teaching but she does not assume that her position means she has all the skills and know-how to effect change on her own. She uses the obligatory data collection and mining of this information to justify a more creative approach to improving teaching practice of children with particular needs. Colette's story reveals her ability to acknowledge her need for consultation and collaboration without admission of incompetency or deficiency. By acting with humility, she appears to understand that such leaderful behaviour might be employed to bring about changes in professional practice which impact positively on children's learning (Towndrow and Tan, 2009).

I challenged all the participants to identify how they might go about having an impact beyond their settings. Several colleagues were overly humble and not quite at the stage where they thought their work would be of interest to others. However, by suggesting ideas, offering points of contact and encouraging them to be brave, many of the participants were able to share their work more widely. Their portfolios demonstrate actions and opportunities taken.

- sharing stories in other networks and forums
- tools and resources being adopted by health service providers throughout the county
- presenting at events and conferences
- leading workshops about projects at other settings
- articles published in county newsletters

- chapters in HertsCam Network publications
- articles published in professional magazines
- vignettes of development work being used internationally at HertsCam sister networks
- accounts of projects used to secure grants for further development
- accounts of projects and portfolios used in interviews for promotion
- case study for Open University film production about the work of the HertsCam Network

Such a wide reach increased the sense of credibility to their efforts at knowledge building and innovation (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2011).

### **Telling stories of development work**

This section draws on the activities from the final session in May to illustrate the way in which I made use of narrative accounts of participants' project work, both conceptually and methodologically, to understand and provoke their learning. Storytelling is a distinctive human feature. Our lives are interwoven with stories, those we tell and hear and those we imagine or dream. We use them to relive and account for our behaviour and interactions, we seek meaning and anticipate future outcomes in their retelling (Polkinghorne, 1988). Bruner says we are characterised by the capacity to make records of 'agentic encounters with the world' (1996:36). Therefore, every participant on the programme had their own story to tell; one about their own concern, their own focus, their own project plan and about the ways in which they enacted the leadership of the development work.

The final session of the programme was given over entirely to an opportunity for participants to tell these stories of development work. This was for several reasons. First, I established that some participants found it difficult to distinguish what leadership practice entailed, although they were engaging with it by initiating and carrying out their development work. I planned the final session with the assumption that narrating such experiences would help participants appreciate the ways each

other had enacted an extended professionalism and so help them reflect on and recognise their own increased capacity for leadership. Second, not only would participants gain insight into their own practice, but they would be contributing to the ‘storehouse’ of knowledge about the nature of teaching and leadership within the network. The stories would present accounts of leadership which, together clarify the type of professionalism the programme intended to support. Third, as the programme was drawing to a close I considered the process of articulating their stories in a friendly environment would be a method for recognising and celebrating their work.

Each participant shared their own story. Some were noticeably nervous but the participants spontaneously cheered each other on, clapping to encourage each member before they began, nodding their heads and demonstrating agreement throughout each telling. I had asked participants to write some concise feedback on a post-it note for each other. At the conclusion of a story, colleagues clapped to show their appreciation and each member of the group walked over to the story teller to hand them a piece of feedback – 14 in total.

I offer four of those stories here. They are presented as vignettes, based on the participants’ telling, which capture the essence of the stories in simplified and polished way. Each one demonstrates a different facet of teacher-led development work.

***Keely’s project: action arising from observation and reflection***

In the ‘Making a difference in the early years programme’ teacher leadership is enacted through teacher-led development work. Here, Keely an early years practitioner at a maintained nursery school relates how her observations of very young children at play bothered her. Using her knowledge of child development and drawing upon the knowledge she had gained previously from her art therapy degree she was able to hone her concerns to a manageable focus for development. The following vignette is based on Keely’s story of her development work, a project to develop children’s language through sensory exploration.



*I was concerned about children a group of children. The ways in which they interacted with the environment, their peers and adults led me to suspect they had not had sufficient sensory experience as babies and toddlers. Montessori, Froebel and Goldschmid recognised the importance of sensory play as a fundamental experience for a child's learning, well-being and general development. Such benefits include:*

- *Language acquisition*
- *Experimentation skills*
- *Attention and concentration by focussing on the given stimuli*
- *Increased hand/eye co-ordination and both gross and fine motor skills*

*I asked myself – if the children did not have these early exploratory experiences, what could I do that would improve their learning and support their carers too? I spoke to parents at their initial parent-teacher interview asking for their thoughts on sensory experiences. Many parents were reluctant to engage in anything messy. This began a dialogue on how they could together support their child's learning in simple ways at home.*

*I questioned colleagues about their own experiences of sensory play and related this to the provision we made for this at the nursery. I led a process of change within our team. We developed a greater understanding of the importance of sensory experiences. We found new ways to support and engage children in sensory experiences during opportunities for child-initiated learning and embedded these in our routines of practice. I also ran a number of workshops for parents showing them that sensory play needn't be messy. The children are taking part in these activities and our observations are showing these seem to be supporting their development.*

**Figure 7D.1: Keeley's story**

What is notable from Keely's story is the central importance of passionate care as a driver for improving professional practice and the exercise of leadership. Her focus for development is far from accidental. Its source is within the participant herself (Moyles, 2001; Taggart, 2011). The process of leadership evolved from her emotional connection and observations of young children, which lies in a commitment to the welfare of young children and their families. Not only did Keely focus on an issue which mattered to her, with support, she was managed to collaborate with colleagues to plan and lead change processes, gather and interpret evidence of the impact of what they have done, and share their enhanced understanding with families. In so doing, she inspired colleagues to also work to change things for the better for the whole setting community. This is a fine example

of what McDowall Clark and Murray (2012:82) would describe as ‘diffused catalytic agency.’

### ***Violet’s project: a story of personal transformation***

Violet was a teaching assistant in the Reception class of a primary school. Her project involved developing a new role for herself that of the *atelierista* (Malaguzzi, 1996). The first phases of her project are recounted here.

*For the last 4 years I have been working as a Teaching Assistant in the Reception class at a primary school. I am committed to listening to and recognising the children’s interests. I think it is important to build on what children already know. I then try to provide a stimulating environment and opportunities for them to explore and express their thoughts and ideas in a range of materials and formats.*

*My role was rather limited though and I was excited when the head teacher asked me to explore the ‘atelierista’ role as used in the Reggio nurseries and to develop this approach in my own work. Although I was unsure at first, I realised that the role would involve me in leading and developing the children’s skill-based knowledge through mark making, using tools, exploring colour and shade, and being resourceful. This fitted very well with my own views about early learning and tied in with my Art degree and my own practice as an artist. My teaching would involve a greater use of scaffolding their learning rather than delivering the phonics sessions in a prescribed manner for example. I was nervous about this as it was a very different way of working.*

*The first challenge I faced was understanding the Reggio approach. I needed to know more about the atelier, where and how I could resource it. I needed to appreciate the style of documentation used in the approach and how I could adapt it for my setting. I knew that finding the time to do everything that was required of me might also be problematic. For example, I wanted to understand better how to plan and deliver the skills-based ideas I had whilst meeting the children’s interests. I also needed to understand how I could incorporate this work into an already very busy Reception class timetable. I knew I would need to negotiate with my colleagues and develop the approach together if it was going to be successful.*

*A further step was to make a visual action plan for my development work. The end point was clear. I needed to provide children with a dedicated space for the atelier. I need to make the atelier a place where children’s ideas and thinking could be made visible, their thoughts noted down and the investigation of their interest visually or audibly documented. I needed to resource the area appropriately. I also needed to work out how and when the children would have access to the area and how I would support them.*

*Whilst designing my action plan I thought about the challenges and keys to success. I knew there would be some financial implications. I wanted to visit any other settings that had taken an interest in developing the Reggio approach. I knew I needed to meet regularly with my class teacher to agree a way of working. I also wanted to have time to share the project with the wider school team. I planned on completing these things by the end of the Summer term.*

*I reflected on my growing understanding of the concept of leadership. I noted that leadership is about having a go, being brave, exploring ideas and listening to others. I recognised if I become confident in my practice I would be able to organise and have greater control the way in which I work with children*

**Figure 7D.2: Violet's story**

Violet's story relates how she interpreted the work of the 'atelierista' and made it her own. By negotiating with her colleagues, she managed to put this role into practice in a reception class in a primary school setting. A number of conditions support this way of working with young children, two were of particular importance to Violet: project work and pedagogical documentation. What I find remarkable is the way in which Violet managed to introduce and foster this climate for learning in a collaborative manner, engaging her colleagues and expanding and making use of a growing network of similarly minded individuals. As a teaching assistant, her leadership of her TLDW project emanated from these relationships rather than any use of positional power or authority.

***Debbie's story of developing collaborative practice***

Debbie was in her second year of teaching when she enrolled on the programme. Her primary school, in an area of great deprivation, has a large early years' department. The team consists three teachers, six early years practitioners and two apprentices and approximately 120 children. Her project was concerned with developing the role of the adult in the outdoor classroom.

*Improving the outdoor learning environment provide at our early years unit was a school priority. It had been noted that the outdoor area was not well enough equipped and did not provide the level of challenge needed to help progress children's learning. I identified a different problem. In my opinion the attitude and behaviour of the adults towards this outdoor provision was*

*problematic. I realised spending buying new resources would have little impact if the adults were not confident to promote children's learning there.*

*A period of consultation followed. Conversations helped me understand my colleagues' concerns about for example how best to use equipment, weather conditions and a lack of understanding about possibilities for teaching and learning outside. I began to set the conditions for enabling my colleagues to develop their understanding and practice.*

*I arranged a number of non-threatening activities to help us as a team reflect on our values and experiences and how these related to our understanding of our current teaching and learning strategies. I took this a step further by introducing a 'challenge tree' which could be moved around the outdoor area. Children in my class had been responding well to challenges I set in this way in mathematics and I hoped that a similar scheme would work in the outdoor environment; equally importantly, I hoped that it would provide visual prompts of how they could further children's learning in specific areas.*

*I created a range of cards with levelled challenges and introduced the concept to staff, encouraging them to think of their own challenge cards too. However, colleagues did not engage as I had hoped; at this point they were still lacking confidence in teaching outdoors and as a consequence were unsure of what to put on to their own challenge cards. I also realised they had little ownership over the process.*

*I decided to take a different approach. During TLDW sessions I have had the opportunity for thinking and reflection. I realised this is something important to facilitate for colleagues too. So, I led several longer workshops for the team, incorporating time for personal reflection, dialogue and practical action. These were an excellent opportunity for collaboration between early years colleagues from different classes who normally didn't work in proximity to each other.*

*I had not considered how important the creation of a shared ethos was. Colleagues are now eager to discuss the learning that could take place, the difficulties sometimes encountered and suggest ways that we could address these. There is a unity across the Phase now. Since this point I have led other workshops and gradually some of my colleagues have taken on more ownership of the process, for example, one colleague created a quiet area for children to sit and reflect and this has proved very popular with the pupils. The process has contributed to addressing a school priority but has also helped with our setting gaining a gold award Early Years Quality Mark scheme with our local authority.*

**Figure 7D.3:** Debbie's story

Any educator might criticise the practice of their colleagues or organisation of their setting but what is important about Debbie's story is her willingness to act on her observations. Despite her newness in the school, and to her role, she recognised and seized an opportunity for improvement. She questioned and challenged the taken-for-granted assumptions that had been made about why the outdoor provision was an ineffective learning environment for children. She then used this in a constructive way to bring about a change, developing her leadership capacity as she sought to improve practice. Her initial attempts were unsuccessful. She was honest about the reasons for this. This took a certain degree of confidence, something that is borne from genuine commitment and self-belief (Macdowall and Clark, 2012). Debbie realised that influence rather than a more domineering or 'telling' approach would engage her colleagues. Using the facilitation approaches she had experienced in the programme was a turning point for Debbie. She decisively moved away from an upskilling or deficit model for change. It focussed her attention on the relational dimension of leadership. In the same way that early years educators seek to build trusting, respectful and sensitive relationships with children and their families, Debbie gradually and intentionally built up a 'valuing culture' (Canning, 2009) in her setting. The genuine opportunities for dialogue Debbie created were the initial stages of the process of sharing the ownership of the development. She recognised that in order to be effective, and to make the necessary changes, everyone's contributions are crucial. By doing so she developed her knowledge of how to develop collaborative working arrangements that would lead to improved educational experiences for children.

***Janet's project: action impacting the wider community***

Janet led an impressive piece of project work. As a team leader at a children's centre, her role involves multiagency, interdisciplinary work. Her project therefore, incorporated not only her professional concern but linked to her workplace priorities for the local community and the strategic aims at county level. Her concern was developing awareness in the community on the effects of sugar on children's health.

*In my work at a children's centre where I lead a team of 9 practitioners. We provide support for 23 local nurseries and primary schools in their work with children under 5. We also work closely with groups of parents and carers, particularly those families deemed 'vulnerable.' I discussed my initial ideas*

*about children's and families' health and well-being at TLDW sessions and by speaking with colleagues in local settings.*

*My discussions highlighted that children's nutrition was a prevalent concern, particularly childhood obesity. Some teaching colleagues appeared to have limited nutritional knowledge, others were unsure how to address issues of health and diet with young children. Others felt it was not their responsibility to be involved with what they viewed as families' choices and decisions. In the light of my discussions I altered my focus to supporting the needs of colleagues in settings.*

*This involved my creating the 'Healthy Eating Project.' With my team members I produced a series of fully resourced lessons for teaching colleagues to use with young children. I also provided some training for interested colleagues to learn more about the role nutrition plays in children's development and learning. I approached the Welwyn and Hatfield Environment Department and secured some funding. With this my colleagues and I created a number of 'sugar boards.' These large displays contain packaging of a number of products that babies and young children consume. Next to each product was attached a bag containing sugar cubes to represent the amount of sugar in the product. Information about the effects of sugar on children's development was also included in visual form and by means of captions, leaflets and so forth. These visuals proved very powerful. They are currently displayed in dentists, breast feeding clinics and doctors surgeries in the area. They have attracted a great deal of attention. I have had to create a booking system to ensure that interested organisations are able to have access to them. The boards contain my contact information and just recently I have added a post-box for feedback on a simple proforma.*

*The impact of my work has been wide ranging. Schools have provided feedback for me about how useful and effective the lessons and resources have been. I have adapted them in the light of this. I noted how their work with children has prompted parents' interest. I have been asked to lead workshops such as 'healthy lunchbox ideas.' I have received communication from members of the public asking for more information about sugar content in foodstuffs advertised for children's consumption. We are arranging further workshops for those who are interested in changing their and their children's diets. We have set up various health and exercise clubs for local families. Although the TLDW programme has finished my project is far from complete. It is flourishing.*

**Figure 7D.4: Janet's story**

Janet's story demonstrated her astuteness. It confirmed her ability to filter information to get to what mattered for children, families and those educational and health practitioners who work with them. She shaped the project and plan for maximum impact through her analysis of relevant national and local data and advice,

but also in reflective dialogue with her colleagues and TLDW group peers. She consulted and collaborated with numerous stakeholders, from children and parents, immediate colleagues, professionals across schools and other settings, those working in local government and in healthcare roles at each stage of her work. This requires particular skills. Straddling professional boundaries may generate tension if particular identities, values and practices seem to be threatened by another's apparent invasion therein (Aubrey, 2011).

She reflected upon both her own understanding of how to collaborate with stakeholders and on the process of change itself, modifying her approach as the project grew in scope. Jane consciously worked to develop a mutual trust between all those she wanted to involve in her enterprise. Her story was not without conflict and misunderstanding but through dialogue Janet sought to open up opportunities for respectful discussion. It was clear from the rich and varied evidence she was compiling that her work has had a significant impact on many of those involved. It has huge potential for further development too. Despite some initial barriers her aims were realised and the project was highly successful.

The format of the final session meant participants had told stories to teach, to learn, to ask for an interpretation and to give one (Czarniawska, 2004). I considered that an interactive element to the task was critical. I listed the leaderful behaviours I noticed in the first story and asked participants to listen for other behaviours in the following stories we could add to the list. I wanted to help build a language for participants to talk about leadership that was perhaps missing from their accounts. Our list included:

- observing need
- seeing a possibility
- making a plan
- taking an action
- making time
- valuing and encouraging others
- caring

- holding others and oneself to account
- influencing and inspiring others
- modelling behaviours
- offering support and advice
- seeking support and advice
- developing partnerships
- making things fair
- asking questions
- observing a situation
- making links explicit
- connecting with others
- finding a different way

Debbie summed up the conversation deftly.

*That's what being professional in the early years is and we can all do it.*

(Research journal, May 2016)

### **The Annual Conference**

The final event of the year was the HertsCam Network Annual Conference in June. This event is celebratory, with a reduced focus on critical friendship and an emphasis on the stimulation of critical debate. Having experienced such positive feedback from their peers some of the participants were regretting not taking the opportunity of leading a workshop. With this in mind I approached the managing group with a request. I thought the whole group and I might lead one of the seminars. I could present the story about the creation of the group and invite each participant to contribute their experiences in some way. My idea was accepted. Inspired by the wooden building block design on a cover of a book, I asked participants to prepare a tool that would help guide their thinking for the input for the session. The tool would also help me in my evaluation of the programme. I asked them to construct a cardboard cube. Participants next had to think of 6 key points about their TLDW



experience. Each one of these would then be represented visually or in words on each face of their cube. I also gave them the option of ‘sharing’ a cube with a colleague if this presented too much of a challenge. Since some participants had been particularly shy about speaking in front of colleagues from other groups and sectors I reassured them participating in this was entirely voluntary. To their credit every member arrived at the Annual Conference with their cube tools.

### ***Leadership building blocks***

The presentation attracted an ‘audience’ of eight TLDW and MEd participants. Participants adjusted the furniture in the room, a horseshoe shape of tables and chairs meaning that everyone would be able to see and hear each other. After my introduction each participant or pair used the visual prompt to share their experiences.



(Building blocks activity, Annual Conference, June 2016)

Their responses were highlighted the following. The importance of critical friendship was noted by all members of the group. Several participants highlighted the differing roles and experiences they each brought to the group and how this enriched and informed their discussions. They recognised differing values and concerns and yet appreciated that improving children’s educational outcomes were what bound them. An image of cupped hands represented the reassurance one participant said she received from the group. Another participant drew attention to a photograph of an ear and reflected that it had been a privilege to be inspired and motivated by the group.

Some referred directly to the effectiveness of the support given in the programme and the tools used. Several participants included photographs of their project plan timelines. Its usefulness in helping them be strategic about their ‘possibility thinking’ was mentioned by one colleague, whilst another noted how referring to it and annotating her progress made it a useful evaluation tool for her and her colleagues. An image of a clock was used by one participant to illustrate the need for more sessions over the year or sessions of longer duration as there was ‘so much to learn and take in.’ It appears that the participants appreciated the protected time the programme, the tools and resources gave them, a key element of effective learning opportunities for early year educators (Nuttall, 2009).

Others directly related to improved personal capacity. A participant shared how she had ‘learned to be confident and use my voice.’ Another reported how initially a ‘whirlwind of ideas’ had overwhelmed her but she had learned to deliberate and reflect on the importance of these before settling on a focus. Debbie provided a paragraph that summed up her experience.

*The impact on my professionalism has been notable. As a result of attending the programme I know I have something relevant and important to share with others, even senior leaders and other professionals. By leading the project I’ve been empowered. I’ve learned to facilitate leadership in others which I know will benefit the children we teach.*

(Debbie, Evaluation tool, June 2016)

In the final section of this chapter I summarise the action undertaken in this stage of my research. I also explain what I learned during this phase.

### **Chapter summary and emerging understandings**

This chapter concluded the third part of the thesis. It demonstrates how participants were using, generating and building knowledge during the process of leading change and development at their settings. I account for how I enabled participants to consider the impact of their projects, but also how they might continue their work after the programme was completed. The four stories, or vignettes, introduced each

demonstrate a different facet of the teacher-led development work carried out by the educators. The stories contributed to a shared understanding of what leaderful behaviour involves.

The following is what I have learned from this stage. I draw attention to those aspects which appeared significant to me about the participants, the programme and my facilitation of it. My emerging understandings comprise insights, issues, challenges and principles that I carried with me into the next stage of the research. The insights emerging from this phase of the intervention are concerned with the professional knowledge generated by individuals and within the group and the mechanisms for sharing this with others.

Story telling was a key vehicle enabling participants to share their experiences of leading the development work process. Whilst some participants were initially a little unsure of how best to evidence the effect of their development work in their portfolios, the opportunities for story telling helped participants to showcase their achievements and realise the extent of their learning. This was dependent on a structured tool to guide their thinking and dedicated time to share their stories within a session. As a result they were enabled to be specific about the impact of the development work on their professional identities, their colleagues' capacities, the wider community but most importantly on the children and families with whom they worked.

It was significant that all participants' stories illustrated the multi-faceted nature of professional knowledge including:

- knowing what to teach young children
- knowing how to create the conditions that enable children to learn
- knowing how to observe, assess and respond to learning
- knowing how to teach young children
- knowing how young children learn and what prevents this
- knowing how to respond to opportunities and problems as they arise

Importantly the stories told helped to conceptualise leadership in the early years sector. Each of the four stories presented in the narrative chapter highlights a different aspect of leadership: one focuses on the role of reflection and observation in guiding the focus for development; one is a story of personal transformation; another highlights the collaborative processes involved and the final one demonstrates the impact on the wider community. Participants understanding of the concept of teacher leadership were deepened. This has implications for enriching future iterations of the programme but also has ramifications for organisational learning and the wider early years community.

Crucially the affective dimensions, the passionate care, that participants identify and demonstrated in their work shone through in every story. The ‘emotional labour’ (Hochschild, 1983) of working with young children is recognised as a key component of professionalism in the sector (Moyle, 2001; Rodd, 2006; Osgood, 2010). Although I recognised this, I had a new realisation that leadership in the sector should embody, unapologetically, the social principle of passionate care. The teacher-led development work approach provides an approach to supporting educators harness this passion and develop the capacity to use it to make changes, no matter how small, which can have a positive impact on young children.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Clarifying a model of support for professional development**

This research was initiated in response to a professional concern outlined in the Introduction. I wanted to develop a programme of support that would enable educators of young children to enact an extended professionalism, one that would nurture and enable their capacity to lead change and innovation in their workplaces. Having developed a programme designed to enhance the professionalism of early years educators, I want now to clarify the model of support for professional development which has been demonstrably successful.

The preceding chapters narrate the research process. The account presented is not the only one that could have been written. It represents a layer of analysis which was informed by my original conceptualisation, experience and values. Having written the narrative, I approached it as a reader with the aim of engaging in a different level of analysis. My method was to consider the key learning points in the narrative which had the potential to illuminate the contribution of my research to knowledge about support for professional development. In this chapter, the issues, insights and key features of the intervention are grouped under four thematic headings:

- the infrastructure of support for professional development
- the focus of the provision of support
- facilitation as a pedagogic mode
- knowledge building and practice development

In each case I present a view of the element of the model, re-examining its conceptual basis and drawing on the narrative to exemplify and illustrate. Colmer et al. (2015) claim that little is known about how early years educators may be enabled to participate in collaborative, collective and situated processes that impact on their professional development. I propose that my study can contribute to the knowledge base for this by offering a model of support that has the potential for achieving systematic, sustainable and transformative change (Waters and Payler, 2015).

## **The infrastructure of support for professional development**

Here the term infrastructure relates to the structure and design decisions that ensured the intervention would be of maximum benefit to early years educators and their organisations. It involves attention to the purposeful development of relationships which served to ensure the intervention was effective in meeting its goals. It involves the practicalities of negotiating and making decisions about the most efficacious use of time, energy, and investment in the process of planning, creating, facilitating and participating in the intervention.

In traditional approaches to providing support for professional development these decisions are taken apart from educators, senior leaders and settings. Why is this? Discussion in the earlier chapters of the session allude to the strongly instrumental approach employed in traditional opportunities for professional development (Wood, 2015). Government funding for many these programmes means they tend to focus on national imperatives such particular approaches to the teaching of synthetic phonics. As a result, these opportunities often employ a deficit model whereby educators are trained or upskilled, with transmission or delivery modes taking precedent. Many of these rely upon delivery by an expert who disseminates information to a passive audience of participants. The programmes are predetermined and content driven. From this perspective there is no need to take account of educators' existing knowledge or local contexts.

The approach detailed in my narrative offers a challenge to the more traditional models of professional development referred to in Chapter 4. The model presented here offers a more direct and immediate way of interacting with the educational community to ensure the what Giddens (2003) refers to as 'co-production.' The model steps away from a provider-client relationship. It harnesses the local knowledge and understanding of senior managers and the complexities of their working contexts across the stages of planning and design of the programme, its facilitation and management. Bovaird (2007) notes that the potential of co-productive practices for the development of support for professional development remains underestimated due to the lack of detailed information about their use.

Although my narrative focuses on a particular group of educators, senior leaders and settings, my study indicates possibilities for bringing about system-wide change.

The following sections demonstrate the significance of the following elements of the approach: challenging the idea of support for professional development as a commodity; collaborating with senior leaders to adapt to the specific context; needs analysis and ownership and lastly the success of the HertsCam TLDW programme as an adaptable process. I explain each in turn.

### ***Challenging the idea of support for professional development as a commodity***

The commodification of support for professional development is referred to in my original exploratory conceptualisation in Chapter 5. It has become a ‘technical object endowed with thing-like qualities’ to be consumed by individuals for their enhancement (Watson and Michael, 2015:14). Opportunities for professional development are fixed and predetermined. This has engendered an industry, marketing an array of readymade events, initiatives and training opportunities. Choices might be made from glossy brochures or websites. In the commodified approach professional development is construed as an event, something that occurs elsewhere, disconnected from the workplace and focussing on the individual acquisition of specific skills and knowledge.

The commodified approach positions educators and senior leaders as consumers of readymade professional support (Brownlee et al., 2015). This raises at least two issues. First, as consumers, school leaders and educators appear to have little to guide their decision-making in the selection of development activities or initiatives. Relatively little is known about the processes they engage with in order to do this (Hadley, 2012), but potential risks of choosing unwisely, include loss of time, ill-spent finances and inappropriately focussed support for educators’ learning and development. Second, the products available are often fragmented and limited in scope (Klechtermans, 2004). What might be available might not necessarily fit with an organisation’s priorities for development or an individual educator’s needs. Many of the opportunities on offer appear to introduce and reinforce narrow conceptions of ‘best practice.’ Others have a negligible impact on the adoption of new pedagogical

practice merely resulting in changes to vocabulary and structure (Winter, 2003) or result in a blanket prescriptive adoption of narrowly interpreted frameworks (Ortlipp et al., 2011). At best such opportunities might represent poor value for money, at worst they might engender impoverished educational experiences for children.

The problematic nature of this featured in the early discussions with the headteachers with whom I collaborated to launch my programme (see Chapter 7A). We were determined to avoid the trap of construing support for professional development as ‘going on a course’ (Keay and Lloyd, 2011:15). My collaborators did not want to buy a predetermined package that would relieve them of the responsibility for leading change by substituting standardised training (Sumison et al., 2015). Rather, the agreement was to provide a process in which the needs of the individual participants could be reconciled with the actualities of their settings as institutions. In the model developed this was achieved by engaging collaboratively with senior leaders during the early planning stages.

### ***Collaborating with senior leaders to adapt to the specific context***

The model of support developed here recognises that senior leaders have the power to make administrative decisions in order to enable educators to access support for professional learning, to allocate funding and resources and support change making processes within the setting (Leithwood et al., 2006). However, the actions demonstrated in the narrative in Chapter 7A may be considered unusual when planning a programme of support for professional development.

By collaborating with senior leaders, their pivotal role in motivating and supporting their members of staff in their professional development is acknowledged (Akkerman et al., 2006; Sylva et al., 2010; Colmer, 2013) but crucially their capacity for ensuring success of the intervention is also maximised. Most importantly this strategy arose from a view that neither prospective participants, nor their senior leaders, are clients or consumers. These collaborations represent a shift away from traditional conceptions of professional development as ‘doing to and doing for’ towards ‘doing with’ (Dunston et al., 2009:40). Instead, senior leaders and others in



the HertsCam Network were positioned as vital, expert and generative co-creators of a model for support for professional development.

Securing senior leaders' commitment was a key driver in successfully engaging educators with the type of support for professional development envisaged in Chapter 4. Collaborating with senior leaders to adapt a model of support for professional development helped to secure this commitment by ensuring its suitability for the specific local context. The narrative establishes that it was necessary to confirm with senior leaders that the aims of the programme, and the principles underlying it, resonated with their own priorities and vision for their early years colleagues' professional development. The premise of the programme proved attractive and so it might be assumed other senior leaders would be similarly supportive and encourage their members of staff to participate.

Policy reform and restricted budgets have had a powerful impact on the access, availability and affordability of support for professional development in this country. Therefore, the approach developed addresses these issues with the senior leaders directly. What the narrative demonstrates is that senior leaders appreciate the opportunity to be involved with the finer details pertaining to these issues, for example, the suitability of the venue, the timings of sessions within the week and the suitability of the programme to the rhythm of the school year were all discussed and taken into account. This resonates with the assertion that any professional development option must be 'relevant, properly costed and evaluated against individual staff development plans and organisational goals' (Waniganayake et al. 2012:237). The senior leaders were similarly keen that the programme should represent 'value for money.' The cost per participant was deemed affordable, particularly with respect to the provision of sessions, individual tutorials, network meetings and certification. As the HertsCam Network is a not-for-profit, teacher-led organisation the programme fees tend to be lower than many others available.

What was evident was that this sense of investment in the intervention also aided its promotion in the wider community. The senior leaders used their capacity for influence within their own networks to raise others' awareness of the value of the

programme. The extent of their commitment ensured the programmes' legitimacy and prompted other leaders to engage with the programme as a source of support for professional development for their own colleagues.

In summary the level of involvement accorded to senior leaders invoked a sense of ownership over the intervention, which proved crucial for its success. The deliberate fostering of collaborative relationships made possible:

- establishing the viability of the programme
- promoting it within the local early years education sector
- gaining an insight into local professional learning needs and priorities
- securing the commitment, interest and support of well-placed, well-respected individuals
- understanding some of the financial and organisational challenges facing senior leaders
- ascertaining that the type of support envisaged was also valued by senior leaders
- ensuring support for prospective participants beyond the programme
- ensuring the fee for the programme was affordable and represents good value for money

Further joint-decision making such as this might lead to more sustainable, systematic and transformative models of support for early years educators (Waters and Payler, 2015). Instead of being reliant on central direction or localised activities in their choice of professional development opportunities, educators and senior leaders would have access to support that has been customised to their needs.

### ***Needs analysis and ownership***

This section explains how the approach developed in this study attended to participant needs analysis during the creation of and throughout the process of leading the intervention. There are certain commonalities with the multidisciplinary evaluation capacity-building (ECB) process offered by (Preskill and Boyle, 2008). This strategy is employed by individuals, groups and organisations to conduct

effective, useful and workplace-based evaluations. A further model, the integrated ECB approach (Labin, 2014) has potential to inform the process of selecting appropriate support for professional development (Sumison et al., 2015). Both these ECB processes involve an examination of what Sumison et al. (2015:424) refer to as ‘presage factors, a range of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that relate to an organisation’s capacity for learning.’ These might pertain to individuals, for example, their attitudes, motivations and assumptions; or to organisations, for example, culture, leadership styles, structures and systems, and communication methods (Labin, 2014). The intention is that an evaluation of these factors might foster individual’s capacity for selecting worthwhile or effective professional development opportunities that develop an organisation’s capacity for learning, such as internships, mentoring relationships (Preskill and Boyle, 2008). The participatory and collective approach is emphasised. However, what ECB fails to address is how it might lead to the construction of new forms of support for professional development, particularly those which engender an extended professionalism within the early years sector of the educational community.

The model developed through this research took educators’ needs as a starting point. Therefore, a preliminary exploration of early years practitioners’ professional identity and their experience of professional development opportunities (chapters 2 and 4) began my empirical work. The programme of support I planned was based on the findings from my exploratory study. In this, participants indicated three enabling and extrinsic conditions for the development of a robust professional identity. They indicated the following: being valued; making connections; making a difference. These three conditions indicate the complex relational aspects of early years educators’ professional identities, and their roles in their workplaces and extended communities.

I worked on the premise that these conditions would be essential to fostering meaningful support for professional development (Nuttall and Edwards, 2009). My narrative chapters indicate the extent to which the programme enabled participants to experience a programme of this nature but most importantly that such an intervention would support them in the enactment of their professional identity in their

classrooms and settings. This is most keenly represented in the participants stories (see Chapter 7D) and demonstrated in the range of leaderful behaviours.

### ***The HertsCam TLDW programme as an adaptable process***

As indicated in the earlier chapters, the programme created through this study is based on the HertsCam teacher-led development process. TLDW was first developed in collaboration with senior leaders and teachers from schools in the secondary school phase of education in a particular region of England (Mylles and Frost, 2006; Hill, 2014). Significantly, senior leaders there understood the role of TLDW in school improvement and were supportive of the aims of the programme. TLDW was firmly embedded in each of the school's efforts to support teachers as instigators of innovation (Mylles, 2017). Each of the TLDW groups constituted members from one school. They were a sub-set of the larger community that is their organisation. These colleagues, although working in different departments and teaching a variety of curriculum subject areas, were already united by the vision and ways of working in their school. Shared understandings and experiences brought a certain cohesive dimension to the TLDW group.

The dialogic nature of the activities in the programme depend upon a group of colleagues being present and willing to contribute and engage with each other in this way. Such collaborative conversations involve a high level of trust being established between participants. They are called upon to give voice to their thinking, understanding and actions about their teaching and the learning they hope to effect in their students.

This established way of working with school-based groups had implications for the model that evolved through this study. Adaptations were made to account for three particular aspects: senior leaders support for the programme and participants; using the TLDW model with educators from a different sector of the educational community and the creation of a group whose participants were derived from multiple educational settings.

Senior leaders understanding of the programme's aims and explicit support for those participating on the programme was a key variable. The narrative accounts for the strategies employed in an effort to counteract these differing assumptions and level of support. The degree to which this was successful was observable through participants' contrasting experiences over the year. Participants' confidence in enacting extended professionalism depended on how the TLDW process was understood by senior leaders and the position it had within the cultural context of the school.

Those participants who experienced a remarkable transformation in their role throughout the process, such as Violet and Debbie, received tremendous support from their senior leaders. These leaders recognised the 'fundamental humanity' of their colleagues (Fleet and Patterson, 2009) as well as their right to professional development opportunities, particularly valuing a programme of support that promoted the growth of dispositions such as creativity, risk-taking, persistence and experimentation. The intervention appeared to take an increasingly embedded position in their settings cultural context. The outcome was very different for one participant, Zoe, as recounted in Chapter 7C. Her headteacher had conveyed enthusiasm for the programme's aims at the interest event early on in the year but Zoe's collage perhaps revealed a fuller indication of the ways in which her setting was led. TLDW did not become a lever for educational change and practice development in the setting despite the support that Zoe availed herself of from various components of the programme. The desire for leading change that Zoe expressed was at odds with her school culture. The TLDW approach was firmly outside of the way in which her setting was led. Many other participants managed to lead very valuable development projects which introduced the non-positional principles of teacher leadership in their settings. Those challenges and difficulties experienced and addressed in the fourth session by the 'locks and keys' activity not only demonstrated the challenges of initiating and leading a process of change but indicated organisational cultures where aspects of extended professionalism, such as agency and collegiality were not the norm and perhaps viewed with some cynicism or suspicion by colleagues. Nevertheless, the model adapted from TLDW demonstrates that individual early years educators can be supported to exercise

agency through the leadership of development work. MacDowall Clark and Murray (2015) argue that for such leadership to be sustainable then it needs to exist in the processes and culture of the organisation rather than being reliant on individuals. I concur but propose that many of the participants in the programme have acted as catalysts for this process of sustainability to begin in their settings. With the provision of the model of support developed here, their newly extended professionalism appears to have prompted and motivated change, irrespective of their position and the taken-for-granted ways of leading in their settings.

The narrative demonstrates, without a doubt, that the model is entirely suitable for fostering and promoting the growth of extended professionalism in the early years phase of education. In some respects, the non-positional nature of the TLDW approach is more suited to members of the early years workforce than it is to school teachers. Educators such as Violet and Janet are not qualified teachers and occupy what might be perceived as low status positions in their settings. Although many structural features and resources were adapted over the research process, the premise that all educators can be supported to make a difference to practice development endured.

There is a burgeoning body of evidence that supports the HertsCam TLDW programme as an adaptable process for the growth and support for extended professionalism internationally (Eltemamy, 2017; Flores and Richmond, 2017; Ramahi, 2017a). While the small-scale of my study might point to the evidence base requiring further consolidation through replication and longitudinal research, the model developed demonstrates that the practice of leadership that is non-hierarchical, relational, responsive and flexible might be supported to emerge in early education settings (Aubrey, 2011).

### ***A multi-setting group***

The narrative chapters demonstrate the key role of deliberate facilitation and responsive planning were key to the adaptation of the TLDW format to suit a multi-setting group. The multi-setting group contributed to its own learning through collective energy via the considered strategies for support. The group that emerged

from the process provided a supportive and collaborative environment for each of its members.

Features of the group's behaviour and actions map onto Easton's (2011) five developmental stages of a professional learning community i.e. defining, exploring, experimenting, reflecting, sharing. For example, the first session contributed to defining the nature and purpose of the group. Group members set their own ground rules. The type of tasks, and participants engagement in them, set the expectation for the forthcoming year. A developmental approach to analysing the group's growth did not entirely fit the way in which the early years group flourished, for example, the narrative chapters demonstrate that although the group engaged in deeper and more sustained reflection and sharing towards the end of the year, these behaviours were still facilitated and observable at and from the first meeting. Instead what can be outlined from the process of developing and adapting the model are a number of observations akin to a list of principles for multi-setting groups. These principles are specific to this particular experience of facilitating this particular group of individuals, at this particular time and in a particular local context. Nevertheless, the principles are relateable and might help others designing and planning such a programme. To be successful a multi-setting group should:

- emerge from a common passion
- be based on an invitational premise
- be sensitive to individual's own contexts and starting points
- be anchored in respectful relationships
- energise its members as a result of their engagement
- maintain a focus on learning

These characteristics typify the culture of thinking and collegiality of working in teams in early years settings (Stonehouse and Gonzales-Mena, 2004). Fleet and Patterson (2009:21) propose that such a group has the potential to evolve into a critical mass of people who can create a local culture and effect sustainable inquiry. The narrative provides the detail of how the participants work impacted themselves, their practices, children's possibilities for learning and new ways of working with

colleagues and families. The scope of this study does not extend to an evaluation of the sustainability of these activities, however, it is worth indicating that three members of the group have gone on to masters degree study, two have been promoted to leadership positions whilst four have achieved a national status 'local leader of early years education,' a role which involves providing one-to-one support for developing the capacity of other early years leaders. Debbie now facilitates the 'Making a difference in the early years' programme. New aspects of participants' professionalism have led to further worthwhile personal and professional growth.

### **The focus of the provision of support**

Discussion in the earlier chapters of the thesis referred to the focus of traditional professional development opportunities as the implementation of policy. Studies have indicated that such an approach perpetuates an understanding of educational change that is linear and dependent on implementation rather than interpretation (Oberhuemer, 2005). They suppose a direct, causal and unidirectional relationship between the content or undertaking of a professional development event, an improvement in professional practice, and children's learning and learning outcomes at the end of the early years foundation stage and later stages of schooling (Doeke et al., 2008; Nuttall and Edwards, 2009). The underlying assumption is that educational reform is dependent on the technical skills of individual educators (Dadds, 2014). Therefore, traditional approaches work from a gap perspective (Korthagen, 2001). They focus on addressing what is presumed lacking by filling the gap in educators' pedagogical understanding, knowledge and skills.

Such approaches are problematic for at least two reasons. First, working from this gap perspective serves to underpin the notion that the educator's role is one of a technician, implementing given theories rather than mediating theory, practice and experience (Edwards, 2009). Educators are not viewed as co-constructors of meaning and knowledge in their work with young children, they are merely passive recipients of information. Second, although learning processes are idiosyncratic, learning does not take place in a vacuum (Kelchtermans, 2004). Contextual issues, both personal



and organisational, as referred to earlier in this chapter, impact on professional identities but also impact practice development and the educators' choice of and interpretation of the theories that influence this practice. Gap filling approaches to professional development do not attend to these influences.

In contrast, the approach to support for professional development accounted for in the preceding narrative chapters shows how the educator in-context, rather than a prescribed content might be the starting point and focus of such the programme of support for professional development (Ball and Pence, 2000). There are several interrelated dimensions to this. The first is a consideration of how such a model goes beyond the focus of skills and content knowledge. The second concerns the goal of extended professionalism. The third concerns personal transformation in institutional contexts. The fourth and final is a consideration of empowerment and enactment rather than transmission and alignment. I explore each of these in detail below.

### ***Beyond skills and content knowledge***

As explained in Chapter 4 the types of training and development available and taken up by many educators is driven by regulatory frameworks, internal appraisal systems and government innovations drive (Teacher Development Trust, 2012). This is in stark contrast to the most effective forms of professional development which MacNaughton (2005) describes as action-focused, collaborative, dialogical and critically reflective in nature. If the focus of learning is purely technical and relates only to matters of compliance matters then educators will lack opportunities to engage in critical pedagogical thinking (Hadley, 2012). Without such a challenge, McCormack (2004) warns that creativity, innovation and change in practice are likely to be inhibited. Additionally, complacent thinking and unquestioned adoption of a narrow approach to best practices transmitted from outside the setting risk the subtleties of interactions, relationships and understandings about practice that have grown and developed over time in response to a setting's particular context and community (Georgeson, 2009).

Instead of a technical-rationalist approach, the model developed here provides educators with support for professional development that resonates with their needs,

engages with their interests and develops their capacities to work effectively with young children and their families (Timperley et al., 2010). The model reflects Kelchtermans's (2004) concerns that opportunities for professional development should encompass opportunities to examine prior knowledge, together with time to integrate new information into existing belief systems with support to explore and try out possibilities for new practice.

### ***The goal of enhanced professionalism***

The model developed through the research process was intended to help educators regain, or experience for the first time, a sense of ownership in their work with young children, despite the national context of 'professionalisation' and 'schoolification' as discussed in Chapter 1. The intervention addresses the issue of professionalism in a national policy context where educators' capacities are reduced.

Professional identities are conceptualised in Chapter 2 as fluid and continuously shaped by experience, policy change and organisational context. The model developed here supposes that an educator might be supported to construe and to enact their professionalism differently. The goal of the intervention is that participants develop an extended professionalism in their work in early years settings. This involves a focus that is collegial rather than individualistic; where the orientation is towards being agential rather than compliant, where the drivers are moral purpose, rather than school inspectors' judgements about standards; where knowledge is created and built by educators themselves rather than being a predetermined element transmitted through a training event and where educators may exercise leadership no matter their status or given role in a setting.

The changes in professionalism experienced by participants were not measured in any way. Pre- and post- testing are not a part of my study. Instead the narrative chapters, and especially the stories told in the final session exemplify, illustrate and illuminate the following:

- what the participants did as a result of their participation in the project
- their reflections on their values and identities
- an explanation of a self-selected focus for improvement
- the design of a plan to develop the focus
- the evidence they collated about the impact of what they did
- information about the consultation process with colleagues and how this refined and improved their development work
- the leaderful behaviours they engaged in during the collaborative process
- the repercussions and impact of their work in the short, medium and long term.

Participants were enabled to make judgements for themselves about the development work they had led. The intervention incorporates opportunities for reflections and story-telling to help participants articulate their enactment of their professionalism.

### ***Personal transformation in institutional contexts***

The focus of my research and the explicit aim of my programme might be encapsulated in the term ‘transformation.’ In the field of educational leadership, transformational indicates an approach in which bringing about change is central (Bass, 1985; Day and Sammons, 2013). In the field of adult learning transformation is associated with conscious raising and internal shifts in perspective (Mezirow, 2000).

Herein lies a dilemma. I did not seek to accomplish one without the other, as I explain next. Whilst traditional approaches to professional development tend to overlook the importance of the self, I planned programme that necessarily supported individuals with the transformation of their perspectives. Throughout the process they were enabled to recognise, examine and articulate the values and assumptions that frame their points of view about their role. The narrative demonstrates participants’ growing realisation that both the identification of and the solutions to problems are within themselves. Clement and Vandenbuerge’s (2000) core themes for professional development include: an increased sense of control in their daily work; a greater degree of flexibility in coping with demands and an increased

capacity to justify their practice. All of these were reported by participants in the ‘Making a difference in the early years’ programme. Their written reflections, their stories and the dialogue within the sessions and relayed in the narrative chapters demonstrate these enhanced capacities.

The model of support developed through the research reflects the sense that we teach who we are (Palmer, 1998). It helped participants to know and accept themselves. Whilst the benefit to specific individuals was palpable, the programme would not meet its aims if such transformations in professional identity did not impact upon the nature of the culture of their workplace. An expectation was that these shifts in perspective would develop and emerge and be enacted during the leadership of collaborative processes to develop practice. Engaging in practice development and making a difference to possibilities for children’s learning depends on educators putting new found self-confidence, developed in the early sessions, into action.

Personal transformation in educational settings is therefore deemed to be chiefly a collaborative undertaking because of the complexity inherent in the process (Colmer et al., 2015). A number of studies (Urban, 2008; Buysse et al., 2009, Nuttall, 2013) support professional learning opportunities which bring all members of a setting together to participate in pedagogical reflection. The HertsCam Network TLDW approach focuses on the impact such transformational learning might have throughout an institution when groups of teachers are involved in the process (Mylles, 2017). Formal and informal opportunities for dialogue ensure that knowledge building is iterative and intensive, building over the year as colleagues interpret and enact new practice suited to their specific context (Rawlings and Sachs, 2014).

This did pose a problem in the planning stages of the intervention as recounted in the narrative Chapter 7A. The majority of those participating in the ‘Making a difference in the early years’ programme were single representatives from their settings. However, the multi-setting group appeared to compensate for this to a certain degree. The group of participants functioned as a professional learning community itself. It was characterised by shared purpose, collaborative processes

and collective knowledge building. The programme with its carefully facilitated sessions and dialogic opportunities offered a context to the early years participants for personal transformation that enabled them to enact these changes in their own settings. Thus, assertiveness and self-efficacy were strengthened and transferred from the safety of the workshop environment - where participants are like-minded and committed to mutual support – to the potentially more hazardous terrain of the interpersonal interactions and transactions that take place in participants' own settings.

I echo MacDowall Clark and Murray's (2012) recommendation that support for professional development might usefully position the individual participant in sub-systems and wider social systems. By doing so, their connectivity to others is recognised and any personal transformation is made relevant to the wider development of the organisation.

### ***Empowerment and enactment rather than transmission and alignment***

The traditional, transmission approach, conceptualised early in the thesis, assumes a direct, causal and unidirectional relationship between professional development, professional practice, children's learning and learning outcomes at the end of the early years foundation stage and later stages of schooling (Doeke et al., 2008; Nuttall and Edwards, 2009). This assumption is challenged. Although teachers' knowledge may be increased or their thinking aligned with the content of policy directives (Wiliam, 2010) this does not necessarily result in improved learning experiences or outcomes for children (Georgeson, 2009). A reliable causal link between such forms of professional development and improvements in professional practice is difficult to establish (Opfer and Pedder, 2010). Conceptualising professional development in cause and effect terms does not necessarily result in quality pedagogical experiences for young children (Nuttall and Edwards, 2009). Traditional models of support do not take into account those factors which mediate any efforts to implement given knowledge, strategies or innovations.

I argue instead that contextual, variable factors such as working practices, educators' theories about pedagogy, their experiences and prior knowledge are not only valid

starting points but are necessary components of a model for professional support. The first sessions outlined in the narrative Chapter 7B demonstrate how self-selecting a focus for development and the guided task for action planning were key in aiding participants to imagine how and why they might adapt and transform their practice. The vignettes in Chapter 7D equally reveal their insight about the challenges of their individual contexts for change. Such an approach is empowering because participants are supported in clarifying their own agendas and pursuing goals they have identified themselves.

The model I have developed focuses on participants as powerful and competent learners. It recognises the importance of building on learner strengths and enabling them to engaging with relevant contextually based areas for development. Peer support is facilitated and participation encouraged through a range of supportive strategies. Such a focus on participants as learners provides a different conceptualisation of professional growth.

The temporal aspect is an essential part of this process of transformation. Systematically focussing on the leadership of practice development over an academic year nurtures participants' growing sense of empowerment. They begin to recognise their own capacity for leadership and they recognise the knowledge they are building with their colleagues in the process. Over time participants are awakened to the challenges and assumptions present in everyday practice and this gives them the confidence to tackle the problems (Sadler, 2002). The sequence and timing of sessions, tutorials and network events and the Annual Conference enhance and deepen the extent to which these capacities are developed. Participation rates were high with the majority of educators attending each opportunity, twelve in total. Their commitment mirrors the value they appeared to attach to the programme.

The facilitative pedagogy employed in my model for support enables the flourishing learning dispositions such as persistence, creativity, risk-taking and experimentation. These leaderful behaviours are exercised and refined during the development process and become part of each participants' repertoire as leaders of change rather than implementers of external innovations.

## **Facilitation as a pedagogic mode**

The provision of support for professional development has an underpinning pedagogy, which is a matter of choice, influenced by a number of factors including values, experience and beliefs about what is most effective. In my research the choice of pedagogic mode was strongly influenced by my own professional values, my experience within the HertsCam Network and the themes arising from my exploratory study. An analysis of participants' responses in Chapter 2 indicated that the following conditions gave rise to a robust professionalism identity.

- being valued
- having connections
- making a difference

I considered that these would form the foundation of a programme of support that would enable prospective participants to develop and enact extended professionalism and developed an approach to facilitation that accorded with the development of these conditions. However, my approach is different to the norm.

The dominant mode of support for professional development employs a training approach. This is behaviourist in nature and relies on a transmission approach to learning. It takes no account of participants' previous knowledge, experience or understanding. The one-size-fits-all approach is prevalent and persists in the area of support for professional development in the early years sector. Much of this training involves a top-down strategy of professional standardisation. Professional development is achieved by a one-day event where 'in-servicing' (Edwards, 2009:84) represents an action that is done to passive attendees. Teacher development is construed as a linear, vertical phenomenon' (Nuttall and Edwards, 2009:134). A transmissive or 'telling' approach is utilised during these training events. It involves educators for example, listening to experts, viewing powerpoints, completing worksheets and reading manuals. Any interpretation of this information is done in isolation from their colleagues and communities. After attending the event or course the expectation is that educators attempt to implement new practices

without reflection or critique. They might be encouraged to ‘cascade’ or impart the information to colleagues, who in turn can implement the particular strategies in their classrooms.

Over dependence on approaches such as these risk the loss of particular practices that have been developed with particular local communities in mind. They also threaten practice development as a meaningful activity converting it into a performance of externally produced ‘best’ practice. Most perturbably they continue to position educators as passive bodies and consumers of the latest policy-driven changes to curriculum and pedagogy.

The respondents in my exploratory study appear to realise that the relationship between educator learning and practice development is far more complex than politicians and bureaucrats would like to believe. My analysis of educators’ experiences of professional development opportunities indicated that what was held to be of most value was:

- using external expertise linked to school-based activity
- scope for educators to identify their own professional learning focus
- support for reflection and planning and experimentation
- emphasising peer support and collaboration
- processes to encourage, extend and structure professional dialogue
- processes for sustaining the professional learning over time to enable teachers to embed the practices in their own settings
- recognition of individual educators’ starting points and enthusiasms
- recognition of particular workplace contexts and diversity within the sector
- is of longer duration
- internal support from senior leadership
- belonging to a setting-based group
- membership of a wider network of like-minded individuals.



The conditions that support and promote this learning are overlooked in traditional approaches as is any notion of how to facilitate the process of knowledge creation and transfer (Hargreaves, 1999). Still, these elements constituted the chief characteristics of my model of support for professional development. To realise them, I needed to develop an appropriate pedagogic mode, one distinct from the dominant approach.

The principles underpinning the programme ‘Making a difference in the early years’ are in complete contrast to traditional approaches to supporting professional development. Imparting knowledge was not my concern. Participants were not viewed as passive recipients of information or instructions for them to implement at a later date. The pedagogic mode I employed in the intervention bears no resemblance the transmissive or ‘telling’ approaches associated with training events. The story in my narrative chapters demonstrates the responsive and adaptive approach I employed which accords with the aims of the programme. It also mirrors the pedagogy employed in early years education. It was based on the values of respect, collegiality and collaboration. It took account of my view of colleagues as professionals who have a moral purpose and might be mobilised to act as change agents.

The approach to facilitation I employed is rooted a social constructivist perspective on learning, as I introduced in Chapter 7A. According to social constructivism, knowledge is actively produced socially and culturally and is not something which merely can be discovered (Geary, 1995; Ernest, 1999). Knowledge is therefore neither wholly attributable to the external world nor wholly tied to the working of an individual’s mind, but it is a social enterprise. It is the outcomes of mental incongruities that result from an individual’s interactions with other people in the environment (Schunk, 2012). Therefore, during the intervention I developed an approach to teaching and learning based on Jones and Nimmo’s directive.

In a changing and diverse world, traditional models of a sole source of knowledge and power cannot be effective in sustaining a viable society... teachers need to engage in continuous dialogue with each other

(Jones and Nimmo,1999:6)

The following sections examine the approach in more detail and draw on examples from the narrative chapters to illustrate it.

### ***The centrality of agency***

The aim of my model of support is to enhance professionalism. Consequently, I needed to employ a pedagogic mode appropriate to securing a system in which participants can become agential and exercise leadership. The term ‘agency’ is often taken to mean simply the capacity to make a difference (Durrant and Holden, 2006) but I reasoned the approach developed would involve enabling the following.

...having a sense of self, encompassing particular values and a cultural identity, and being able to pursue self-determined purposes and goals through self-conscious strategic action.

(Frost, 2006:20)

A key consideration is that agency might be developed and maintained by the individuals involved in the programme with supportive conditions. My approach had to counter structural limitations of the national and local context to achieve this, including a lack of protected time to talk and collaborate, little ‘headspace’ for individuals to make decisions that matter to them and have repercussions for children’s learning and the need for positive attitudes to towards ongoing learning amongst educators (Fleet and Patterson, 2009). Prospective participants at the interest event recounted in Chapter 7A relished the idea that such opportunities were going to be made available to them. Facilitation is partly about creating the conditions within which people can think for themselves, support each other in their reflection and planning about their goals and intentions (Clarke and Hollingsworth, 2002). Such conditions had the potential to support consciousness raising and the development of new practices that pertain to the exercise of agency (Sumison, 2004).

### ***Reflection on personal goals and intentions***

Participants’ professional experience was a resource for learning. Since the goal is empowerment, then my facilitation of the programme needed to make use of these experiences and enable participants to connect and make use of them. In order to support the development of participants’ agency, the approach I took assisted participants with determining a focus of their own choosing for development.

Selecting their own focus for development tapped into the passion referred to earlier. Emotional engagement is high when educators are enabled to explore aspects of practice which are of inherent interest to them (Manning-Martin, 2006). By having opportunities and support to examine their existing beliefs, participants engagement was further deepened and secured as they were able to consider the limitations and possibilities their thinking and structural conditions might have pose for changes in practice and plan to do something differently (Nabhani et al., 2014). Only by doing this were they able to engage with a leadership process designed to cultivate their empowerment as professionals.

Over time these educators demonstrated how their expectations of themselves and their own role broadened. Yelland and Kilderry (2005) would describe this as a process of self-reconceptualisation. Enhanced agency means educators are no longer overly concerned with compliance. Instead of asking ‘what should I do?’ they were thinking for themselves about new possibilities to solve the problems they had observed and finding new ways to adapt to changing educational circumstances.

### ***The use of tools to enable dialogue and reflection***

The facilitative mode utilised involves a number of key dimensions. Two of these are enabling reflection and enabling dialogue. Dialogue and reflection are recognised as activities which might enable educators to scrutinise everyday practice and routine decision-making about children’s learning and to consider alternative ways of thinking and possibilities for action (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2007). Facilitating this is essential if participants’ understanding of themes relevant to the development of their practice and the leadership of the process are to be deepened. Participants were not expected to engage in problem-solving processes in isolation. Reflection can take different forms but collaborative reflective processes involving a critical friend may be more effective and sustainable than critical reflection by oneself (Raban, 2007). The nature of the group experience was key. I was not positioned as an expert instead there was an expectation that participants would learn from engaging in dialogue and reflecting with each other. This would only be effective if the facilitation of the programme engendered an atmosphere of openness and trust. The starting point for this occurred in the first session when participants

agreed a number of points including: the need to listen to and respect differing viewpoints and perspectives, to listen and be listened to, but to also to challenge each other's assumptions.

I produced a number of tools and artefacts which were intended to provide focus, stimulation and structure for shared reflection and dialogue between group members. The tools varied in their use, format and complexity. Some scaffolded individual reflection, others were used in paired or small group to stimulate discussion. A number of them aided the collation of ideas represented by opportunities for whole group discussion and reflection. Some tools were used as prompts such as sentence starters and photos. Some were intentionally contentious to provoke and air differences in perspectives. Others enabled participants to plan their projects. Although some of these tools related to specific steps in the TLDW process, many of them were related in response to my assessment of the group's general needs or related to problems or challenges highlighted by participants in tutorials.

Opportunities to engage in these discursive activities meant individuals were able to clarify their values and priorities, communicate their standpoints and challenge each other. Participation in such focused and productive discussion contributes to the ability to express ideas with confidence but also involves considering alternative ideas and perspectives.

Planning and creating such tools and successfully engaging participants in such robust dialogue this might be challenging. As a facilitator sensitivity is required to enable participants to present and discuss different viewpoints. For participants managing their own emotional responses, if challenged by others, requires resilience (Beatty, 2007). Carter and Fewster (2013) emphasised that it is not the tools that make the difference, rather it is the support provided by the facilitators in scaffolding dialogue which led to major changes in increasing self-confidence and improved practice.

Similarly, in the narrative I identified strategies that engender participant engagement and an agentic orientation. In common with Poekert's (2011) findings

these were supportive in uncomfortable moments or if I sensed participants felt intimidated. At other times they provided a ‘push’ for participants as I attempted to maximise their learning. The strategies I refer to below are those which I used throughout the programme, in conjunction with the tools, to help participants talk about their leadership, the challenges of collaborative practice development and their enactment of professionalism. Facilitation as a pedagogic mode involves:

- developing and maintaining professional relationships with participants
- developing awareness of each participant’s working context and its challenges and affordances
- making no assumptions about participants’ previous understanding, experiences
- actively listening to participants
- altering, modifying the programme and its activities in response to what has been heard
- anticipating reactions and situations
- not shying away from letting participants disagree
- avoiding dominating discussions or providing solutions
- asking open questions that prompt educators’ reflections and enables them to find their own solutions
- acknowledging differences of opinion/multiple perspectives
- demonstrating self-awareness about own non-verbal communication
- appealing to participants’ values and interests to promote programme aims
- drawing on own understandings and experiences to support discussion.

### **Knowledge building and practice development**

Part of my initial conceptualisation involved considering the role of knowledge in the provision of support for early years educators’ professional development (see Chapter 4). Shulman’s work in the 1980s often underpins attempts to specify the knowledge that teachers should acquire in their initial training programmes. Categories such as ‘Content knowledge’ and ‘Pedagogical Content Knowledge’

(Shulman, 1986 & 1987) offer a helpful starting point for such specifications. Where a professional qualification is at stake, it seems reasonable to enable gatekeepers to be able to judge whether entrant to the profession can demonstrate sufficient knowledge in definable areas. However, there are a number of problems associated with this.

The relationship between specifications of professional knowledge and the development of educational practice are complicated. It is not simply a matter of the distinction between declarative and procedural knowledge (Ryle, 1949) or *episteme* and *techne* in classical Greek terms (Gould, 1955). The development of practice inevitably takes place in particular social contexts, such as schools and related settings, and so practice development is shaped by organisational norms and opportunities for reflection and collaboration. This is why it is argued that within professional contexts knowledge tends to be ‘sticky’ (Hargreaves, 1999). In my own exploratory study, it became clear that early years educators’ experience of professional development programmes indicates that the ‘training’ packages they tend to be offered can be disempowering (see Chapter 2). In contrast, what was being promoted in our group was a culture of thinking, a nurturing environment (Stonehouse and Gonzales-Mena, 2004).

Another conceptual difficulty revolves around questions not only of what kind of knowledge is of most value but also of the processes through which knowledge is created within social contexts. The use of the term ‘knowledge building’ in the HertsCam Network refers to the way knowledge is not just derived from accounts of practice but also how it is continuously shaped and refined through dialogue but within staff teams and in wider networks (Frost, 2012). This view of knowledge echoes the debate about Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge in which knowledge production is located in social contexts and is practice focused (Gibbons et al., 1994). The approach to support for professional development accounted for in the preceding narrative (Chapter 7) offers a way forward in relation to knowledge building. There are two dimensions to this. The first concerns the leadership of process of development work in which participants learn to exercise agency in the pursuit of

improved practice. The second concerns the vital role narratives play in knowledge building.

### *The leadership of change*

The programme is based on a quite different concept of leadership to that which is normally understood. Many of the participants lacked the status and authority that might be assumed to flow from designated formal positions of authority in their workplaces. The conceptualisation also differs from that presented in in Bennett et al.'s (2003) report whereby senior leaders relinquished power to enable positional leaders the autonomy to lead work in their teams.

The model is built around a more inclusive conceptualisation of leadership which assumes that any educator can be empowered and enabled to exercise leadership (Frost, 2014). The model of support enables participants to extend their mode of professionalism so that it includes a commitment to be influential in their settings. Such a mode not only reinvigorates individuals and re-establishes a sense of ownership, it is key for capacity building and the transformation of practice in educational establishments.

Participants who want to take up the challenge of leading change in their schools, and help their colleagues learn from each other, need to sharpen their ability to communicate their ideas. They also refine the art of negotiation and persuasion to induce others to work with them. They require 'emotional intelligence and the ability to draw on a repertoire of strategies for inspiring, influencing and negotiating with others' (Children's Workforce Council, 2010:107). Early years educators are often found to dissociate themselves and their daily practice from notions of leadership (Rodd, 2006), preferring instead to focus on their direct work with children. In the narrative chapters I indicate how some participants had difficulty recognising their potential as leaders. It appears though that the idea of the development project was key to helping them appreciate how the step-by-step approach enabled them to enact leadership and recognise these actions as leaderful. The collaborative process acts as a safeguard against the 'cascade' approach to knowledge sharing often employed by traditional approaches. In these cases it can

be difficult to convince others who did not attend one-day events of the potential benefits to changes in practice.

### ***The process of development work***

Inquiry-based, process-driven approaches to teacher professional development involves systematic and intentional reflection on practice (Dana and Yendall-Hoppey, 2003). A defining feature of effective models of support for professional development is the encouragement of participants to undertake ‘intentional investigation’ of their practice (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993). The development work process at the centre of the ‘Making a difference in the early years’ programme goes beyond this. It is a means for maximising agency where the focus for change is something that the individual really cares about. They are supported to imagine how they might lead a development project focussed on this and improve practice in this area.

Moral purpose is the catalyst for change agency. These can be put to work through development work which is strategic and focused. Deliberate action is carried out within a collaborative, planned and sequential process. Participants problematise practice, engage with dilemmas of leading change and development of practice, strategically experiment with and develop with new strategies, collaborate with colleagues, build and share knowledge in the process in their own settings, in the TLDW group and across the greater Network (Hill, 2014).

Authentic professional learning and development occurs through the process of leading development work (Groundwater-Smith and Campbell, 2010). The tinkering that occurs when teachers fail to make a significant contribution to the creation of professional knowledge is avoided. The ‘sticky knowledge’ referred to earlier is made more explicit and transferable in settings through their growing experience of consulting, negotiating, reflecting, self-evaluating and deliberating in collaboration with others.



### ***Practice development***

Practice is developed as participants lead the process of change through their projects. In action research driven studies there is a tendency to focus on the reporting about efficacy of the methodology. This positions teachers' own work as tangential in the research process and disconnects it from the development of the body of knowledge being built. This is a crucial oversight and one which should be addressed in any research that seeks to amplify educators' voices. It is perhaps important to note that, for the vast majority of teachers, becoming a better teacher means enhancing student learning outcomes (Reeves and Forde, 2004). An early study of teachers' perceptions of success, for example, found that, 'regardless of teaching level, most teachers define their success in terms of their pupils' behaviours and activities, rather than in terms of themselves or other criteria' (Harootunian and Yargar, 1980:4).

In the proposed model, participants' learning is integrated with the development of pedagogical practice; practice that occurs in collaborative contexts and shared spaces on a daily basis (Rinaldi, 2012). New contractual and procedural knowledge was generated and built through a number of ways. Educators very quickly found a focus for practice development through facilitated opportunities for dialogue and reflection. The first session enabled them to discuss 'what bothers me?' They considered the problems and dilemmas inherent in these problems and theorised as to how they themselves might develop and refine their practice to improve the situation. They planned a project, although this may have evolved differently in practice. The stories in Chapter 7D illustrate how contextualised knowledge is produced through praxis, the synthesis of theory and practice and negotiated with colleagues in particular contexts (Campbell and McNamara, 2010).

Debbie's story in Chapter 7D demonstrates that practice development is the outcome of leading change. The initial provocation came about through activities for reflection and consideration that Debbie had planned for her departmental colleagues at what is known colloquially as an 'in-set' day at her school to illustrate what I mean by collaboration. Debbie took a risk initially asking her colleagues to work in new ways with each other and deprivatising their understanding of the role of adults

in children's learning in the outdoor environment. These activities produced some disagreement and confusion to begin with but with care Debbie was able to facilitate her colleagues' appreciation of the problem she had recognised. Debbie's project enabled a team of colleagues to begin to create and build-context specific professional knowledge of their own. This knowledge came about through genuine opportunities to take action, to reflect and to engage in dialogue about the transformation of professional practice. New practices were incorporated into colleagues repertoires and new understandings acted upon. Layers of change occurred over time: new materials, skills and knowledge, values underpinning practice were observable (Fullan, 1993). The work supported the growth of authentic relationships in the school (Starrett, 2007) but the outcome was a collective sense of ownership over the change and the considered development of practice.

Practice development occurs during, and as a result of, ongoing challenging reflection where existing ways of doing early years pedagogy are questioned. Participants can reconsider and help colleagues reconsider the values and theories underpinning their practice (Wong et al., 2013). Debbie's story and those of the other participants demonstrate the following point well.

Learning is at once deeply personal and inherently social; it connects us not just to knowledge in the abstract, but to each other.

(Senge et al., 2000:4).

The following section demonstrates the role that these narratives play in collective knowledge building.

### ***Building knowledge collectively through narratives***

The value of teachers' professional learning in this approach to professional learning, for individuals and for groups of teachers, could not easily be captured or articulated in any model of teacher learning input and outputs. (See Sachs, 2003, 2005; Parr, 2004.) My research demonstrates how narrative accounts of participants' leadership of development work might be used conceptually and methodologically to build knowledge collectively. Developing and sharing narratives is an essential component of the model I developed. Narratives are recognised as having a rich role

in social life (Czarniawska, 2004:1). They are a productive device for generating and building understandings related to those who work in social settings. They are the means by which participants make sense of their professional experience and are enabled to engage in critical reflection on both their practice and their thinking.

Providing the structural means for educators to engage in this activity away from their workplaces is key. The tools and resources used in the programme sessions enable them to use storytelling as a tool to reflect on their practice and their growing capacity for leadership. Stories are produced in a number of formats both written and verbally, including vignettes, initial reflections, publishable summary, oral storytelling. In the portfolio they are encouraged to reflect on critical, important events. The processes of narration helps educators externalise their knowledge by talking about and creating stories about what they know and what they have experienced. Tacit is made explicit in this externalisation process (Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995). Examples illustrate the challenges, joys, difficulties and pleasure in leading a process of change. As educators they are characters in their own stories, which they author (Connelly and Clandinin, 1996). The power of this voice reinforces the transformation engaging with the process of leading development work offers. Thus, the participants' stories provide evidence of their evolving ideas about their professional identities and the ways in which they enact their professionalism.

Storying confronts traditional discourses of professional development. The telling of and listening to stories provides opportunities for deep learning beyond those associated with pragmatic, skill-based transmission models of professional development (Fleet and Patterson, 2009). Personal perspectives are offered to a wider audience during the sessions and Network Events. Participants present stories of leadership of practice development and of their professional growth. The value is not purely in the telling or disseminating knowledge or information about how to teach or how to lead. The stories of experience are the yeast of professional learning (Fleet and Patterson, 2009). Knowledge is combined as it is more integrated and made systematically available to others to scrutinise (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). In the dialogue that ensues colleagues offer comparisons with their own experiences.

This leads to the verbalisation of meaning making and a collective understanding and self-efficacy (Frost, 2012b).

Narrating the process became the provocation for reflection, the motivation to engage in reconsidering taken-for-granted practices. Additionally, educator produced stories are subsequently crafted for further sharing. Examples of these contextually-based, real life situations will provide examples of depth of knowledge and meaning to second iterations of the programme. They will help future participants internalise knowledge about key principles underpinning the programme.

In summary teaching and learning are complex processes and educators' stories provide thick descriptions of episodes from their development work and the classroom and professional interactions that occur during the process (McAninch, 1993). They offer opportunity to enhance reflective thinking for individual participants such cycles of reflective thought contribute depth to professional decision making and emphasise the transformational nature of the process (Richert, 1991). When scrutinised these narratives make worthwhile contributions to the professional knowledge base and so value educators' voices and expertise (Fleet and Patterson, 2009).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter represents a further layer of analysis of the intervention depicted in the narrative. I considered the learning points from each of the four episodes. The four thematic headings gather together key issues, insights and features of a proposed approach to programmes of support for professional development. The analysis constitutes both a critique of dominant modes of professional development for early years educators and an alternative approach. There is also potential to contribute to a practical handbook for those similarly seeking to support the enhancement of professionalism in the early years sector.

The premise is that participants should not be regarded merely as consumers of professional development activities or opportunities; rather the participants and key stakeholders in the schools must be active agents in the development of programmes

in their localities. Decisions about the infrastructure of such programmes need to be collaborative to ensure co-production involving with participants and senior leaders in order to meet local needs. Provision for support has to step away from the usual ‘upskilling’ and instead focuses on a pedagogy for empowerment and enactment rather than transition and alignment. A culture of thinking has to be promoted to engender the building of knowledge through action and the sharing of narratives. Such an approach counters and confronts traditional discourses, valuing educators, helping them to make connections but ultimately enabling them to make a difference to the educational experiences of the young children they teach.

## Conclusion

The focus of my research emanated from a professional concern; one arising from my everyday role as an independent consultant providing support for the professional development of those working in the ‘early years’ sector of the education system, which involves babies and children aged up to five years. It seemed to me that a number of early years educators appeared overly compliant in their approach to their work with young children; unwilling transmitters of an unsuitable curriculum, reproducers of knowledge rather than pedagogues or co-constructors of knowledge with children (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999). The national context contributed to this prevailing view of early years education, particularly discourses of professionalism and school readiness (Chapter 2). Whilst these interactions and the prevailing context compelled me to act as a researching practitioner, what also shaped my perspective and chosen approach to my research was a recent, albeit brief, return to the classroom (Chapter 3). An exploratory study confirmed there was no universal early educator professional identity, but it did indicate that particular conditions sustained respondents in their work with young children and their families. This experience extended my understanding of professionalism (Hoyle, 1974) and how it may be enhanced.

My research was therefore closely aligned to my own daily practice and addresses what for me was problematic in my interactions and work with early years educators. In contrast to traditional approaches to support for professional development, I decided to create and lead a more facilitative intervention. This programme of support was intended to enable participants to develop and enact a particularly agential mode of professionalism, helping them to negotiate the challenges and constraints inherent in their work with young children and their families. My aim was intensely practical and focused on making a difference to a particular group of people. Therefore, my approach to the research was necessarily action-based and developmental in nature.

The narrative chapters (7A-D) critically analyse the intervention at the heart of the research process. The story illuminates and illustrates how I went about achieving

the aims I set myself. I was aware that my interpretation is necessarily subjective and sought to exercise the reflexivity described in Chapter 5, as I presented participants' stories and the events and dialogue from various elements of the programme.

I wanted to work with early years educators in a way that would address the core problem outlined at the beginning of this chapter but would also create knowledge about how best to support them to enact their professionalism in a satisfying, sensible and sustainable way in their own specific contexts. A particular model of professional development developed and emerged from my analysis of the intervention (Chapter 8). Crucially, I did not aim to produce generalisations about the one best way to do this. Nor did I seek to prove causal links between the 'Making a difference in the early years' programme I devised and a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. However, my insights clarified the contribution of my research to the field of support for professional development in the early years sector. I propose that early years educators may be supported in such a way that enables them to participate in collaborative, collective and situated processes that impact on their professional development. I outline four important themes below.

First, the infrastructure surrounding the proposed support for professional development should be carefully considered. Collaborative relationships with senior leaders and educators should be nurtured in order to ensure that there is a shift towards positioning them not as consumers of readymade professional development packages. My enablers proved to be vital, expert and generative co-producers of models for professional development.

Second, the focus of the provision of support should acknowledge the educator and her context as the starting point for professional learning rather than preconceived content based on specifications of knowledge and skills. Such a model goes beyond technical-rationalist approaches and recognises that empowerment and enactment can only be fostered when participants are first recognised as competent learners and enabled to enact leaderful and agentic behaviours in their work.

Third the choices made about the ways in which the programme is facilitated should be appropriate to securing a system in which educators can become maximally agential and exercise leadership. The pedagogic mode needs to incorporate tools that enable both reflection and dialogue in order to create a community which has the capacity foster mutual inspiration and offer mutual critical friendship.

Fourth, knowledge building and practice development should be viewed less as the development of technical know-how and the dissemination of teaching tips. Through the sharing and scrutinising of narratives of leading change and development, collective understandings and self-efficacy might flourish within the group. The effect is of a sense of belonging to an early years community, which might be diverse in its make-up but nevertheless shares common goals and values.

As for the legacy of my project, I am excited by a number of developments. The research and the programme I created has received attention from others researching in a similar way (Trodd et al., 2018; Rogers et al., 2017; Ingleby, 2017; Colmer, 2017; Elwick et al., 2017; Dogan et al., 2016 and Lofthouse et al., 2015). Exciting plans are being made for the next academic year, as a previous participant and I will be leading four new groups across the county, with potentially 40 new participants. I have also been approached by the CEO of a chain of nurseries in the East of England, who is interested in learning more about the teacher-led development work approach. This means I need to consider the outcomes of my research from a system-wide perspective.

With any worthwhile innovation comes the question of ‘scaling up’ (Quint, Bloom, Black and Stephens, 2005). The issue has arisen on a number of occasions within the HertsCam context and related International Teacher Leadership initiative (Frost, 2011). The leader of the ITL programme in Cairo (2014) concluded ‘It is a matter of choosing between scaling-up and high-quality implementation’ (Eltemamy, 2017: 246). The evidence I present here shows that the careful nurturing of collaborative relationships in particular localised communities is essential to the success of programmes such as the one accounted for in this thesis.



My doctoral study has been one of the most difficult yet one of the most life enhancing experiences I have encountered. I was aware that doctoral research might pose inherent risks, burdens and uncertainties. Completing my masters study over two years whilst working full-time as a deputy headteacher in a large primary school was challenging. However, this did not prepare me for a self-funded venture lasting five and a half years, during which time I balanced leading an intense action-based study with the needs of a young family and numerous part-time and full-time jobs and modes of working. I began my study with pragmatic aims and a view to researching and improving my own practice, however I now see the parallels between my experience of undertaking doctoral research and the aims I had for the early years participants joining the programme I created.

Profound and lasting transformations have occurred which have shifted my own identity over the last five years. I was already a highly experienced teacher and educational leader at the outset of my study, yet I was positioned as a novice as I commenced my doctoral study. I needed to scrutinise my own assumptions and be realistic about my disposition to learning new and different ways of being. Yet I had made a choice to engage with this long-term undertaking and was determined to complete it successfully.

The EdD programme was a new venture for the University and I was a member of the third cohort. I found sustenance in the emerging network of fellow doctoral researchers. Just as the participants in my intervention benefitted from a diverse network of colleagues, I was able to engage with peers from across a range of educational settings and other professional contexts. As a lone representative from the early years sector, I was forced to articulate my values and explicate the rationale for my proposed study in a way that others might understand. Supportive relationships and a sense of collegiality provided succour at times of stress and the effort of coping with the multiple demands of family, work commitments and study. Writing the thesis proved my greatest challenge in this context. Doing justice to those who participated was my key concern. However, I recognise that the thesis is only one product of my doctoral process. As my participants did, I also engaged with multiple opportunities to network and share my research with others; presenting

at conferences, via online forums and through publications. Not only has my work opened up a further research agenda for me, it has led to opportunities to further expand the programme that was developed throughout the process. The contribution the research process made to the participants and their settings, to the wider HertsCam community and to my own learning absolutely justifies the struggles and the costs borne.

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## Appendix 6.1

### Phases of the research process

Phase	Action	Time frame	Key activity
Creating the conditions	1. Establishing a need	April 2015	Communicate my professional concern with members of the early years community - A reconnaissance
	2. Securing approval	April - May 2015	Approach HertsCam Steering Committee to secure their approval for the programme to become part of the suite of programmes offered by the Network Engaging key collaborators Engaging key enablers
	3. Developing the intervention	April - June 2015	Designing the programme Seeking feedback from key collaborators/enablers
	4. Promoting the intervention	May - Sept 2015	Stimulating interest in the programme Publicise programme Recruitment event
Taking action	5. Engaging with the programme	Oct – July 2015	Launching the programme – 6 twilight sessions 2 tutorials 2 network events Annual Conference 3 Termly evaluation points
Evaluating the programme	6. Reviewing the action	July 2016	Evaluating the research project
	7. Sustaining the action	Aug 2016	Preparing for the second year of the programme



## Appendix 6.2

### Sources of evidence

Source of evidence	Documentation format	Strategy or activity	Evidence for analysis
The programme calendar	Academic year calendar for programme	Use example as a guide	Information about the provision of support for teacher leadership
Collages/3D representations	Photographic images and written reflections	Using a range of materials Educators are asked to make a representation of their professional identity. They will present these to each other. I will make notes	Information about perceived professional identities
Workshop activity: Educators and professionalism	Set of cards bearing statements such as 'To be a good EYE you need to be able to collaborate with colleagues to build new professional knowledge'	In a group session ask participants to form trios. Ask them to arrange the cards to represent the relative importance of each statement. Discussion is necessary to agree on the arrangement. They then prepare to defend their arrangement when other group members come to look at it.	Photos of the card arrangements and flip chart statements listing the most and least important statements. (research notes also record the thinking evidence in the discussion.)
Initial statements written by participants	'Clarifying values and concerns' interview / reflection sheet	As trios. A uses the sheet to question B while C takes notes under the headings. C gives B their notes. Then rotate the ABC role.	A considered reflective statement from each participant which becomes first item in portfolio.
Participant reflections on each session	Written reflections - proforma	This should be used by the participants on every occasion to create a record of what occurred. In addition, any visitor to a group session might be asked to use the sheet to record their observations.	Detailed information from multi-perspectives about the sessions, making them visible and identifying the issues arising
Supervision / interviews with individual participants	Checklist of themes to explore in each one-to-one meeting. Proforma for recording	The one-to-one sessions must primarily serve the needs of the individual participant but are also opportunities to learn about their experience and views. I will use the checklist unobtrusively to guide their	A record of issues and experiences from the participants' point of view. Insights into the obstacles to innovative practice and the

	anything gathered about the themes.	listening and take a few minutes at the conclusion of each one-to-one meeting to record any useful insights.	conditions that support it.
Workshop activity: what kind of group are we?	A sheet which sets out a number of alternative characterisations of group interaction with spaces to allow participants to respond.	Ask each participant to consider the alternative characterisations of interaction – e.g. sharing, mutual problem solving, and critical friendship. Then they discuss in pairs, then feedback to whole group. Someone records outcomes on a flip chart.	Photos of the flip charts will capture views about the patterns of collaboration and the quality discussion within the group. (research notes also record the thinking evident in the discussion.)
Participant project plans	Format and facsimiles of project plans	In a group meeting, distribute copies of a facsimile of an educator's plan and ask for discussion. Distribute a format (proforma) and ask participants to form pairs in order to discuss their own first thoughts about their plans. Ask them to draft plans and submit them a week later to me for comment.	Copies of the project plans together with my written comments will capture the participants' initial thinking and my comments should highlight the tensions and issues.
Programme leaders' research notes	Running record - observation and reflections	Notebook / journal carried with me to every event – group session or network session and use it to make notes that correspond to the checklist of themes.	Source of narrative for thesis
Records of consultation	Format and facsimile of a Record of consultation	Distribute the 2 sheets in a session. Allow time for discussion and then ask group members to use the sheets whenever they have consulted someone about their priorities and plans.	These will reveal the extent to which and how participants are engaging with the setting as an organisation as they lead the collaborative process
Summative reflection statements in portfolios and summary of development work project	Guide sheet about writing a 'Summative Reflection'	Distribute this sheet to members of the group and talk it through with them. Ask them to talk to each other in pairs about what they might write.	A considered reflective statement from each member of the group.

	Format sheet - 'Summary of development work'	Distribute this sheet to members of group and talk it through with them. Ask each person to tell the whole group what they will write. Emphasise that this statement should be brief so that others beyond the group can easily read it.	Copies of summaries will help me to describe the range of projects carried out.
Impact review workshops	Proforma - 'Reviewing impact'	Distribute this sheet to members group and talk it through with them. Ask them to work in pairs – explaining to each other and writing notes for each other.	Field notes about the range of impact and examples of these.
	Workshop guide sheet 'Charting the impact'	Put a large piece of paper on each of 4 desks. Each one has a different heading e.g. 'Impact on colleagues'. Ask Educators to form small groups, scribbling examples of how they have made a difference on the sheet and then moving on to another sheet.	Photos and notes to capture the range and type of impact.

## Appendix 7.1

### Programme calendar

Session	Date	Broad aims
Session 1	17 <sup>th</sup> September 2015	<p>Introduce the aims of the course to early years educator participants.</p> <p>Reflect on professional identities and for participants to analyse their work contexts.</p> <p>Clarify their professional concern and consider how their project might make a difference to the young children with whom they work</p>
Session 2	1 <sup>st</sup> October 2015	<p>Consider conceptualisations of leadership</p> <p>Explore importance of consultation with colleagues</p> <p>Produce an action plan</p>
Network Event	14 <sup>th</sup> October 2015	Contribute to knowledge building within and across the Network.
Session 3	12 <sup>th</sup> November 2015	<p>Review their action plan</p> <p>Consider the activities that will help to take their development project forward.</p>
Tutorials	December 2015	Review progress with their development work
Session 4	21 <sup>st</sup> January 2016	<p>Consider challenges and adjust their plans in the light of the challenges that have arisen.</p> <p>Consider growing understandings of the practice of leadership</p>
Session 5	25 <sup>th</sup> February 2016	Reflect on what they are learning about learning and about their growing professionalism from their experience of leading development work and how they might begin to share the story with others.
Tutorials	2 <sup>nd</sup> April 2016	<p>Review the impact of their development project and how this can be extended.</p> <p>Take stock of their portfolio of evidence.</p>
28 <sup>th</sup> April 2016	Network Event	Contribute to knowledge building within and across the Network.
Session 6	19 <sup>th</sup> May 2016	An opportunity to share stories of development with colleagues in the group
Drop-in session	June various dates	Drop-in session for support with finalising the portfolios for submission.
Annual Conference	24 <sup>th</sup> June 2016	<p>A celebration of the year's work</p> <p>International networking opportunity</p>